TRUE PROMISE of PARADISE

Sheikh Muhammad Mitwalli ash-Sharawi

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ سَنُدْخِلُهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ
تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا ۖ
وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقًّا ۚ وَمَنْ أَصْدَقُ مِنَ اللَّهِ قِيلًا ﴿١٢٢﴾

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A brief word about Shaykh Muhammad Mitwalli ash-Sha'rawi

His Excellency the Shaykh, the Imam, the caller to Islam, Muhammad Mitwalli ash-Sha'rawi, was born on 16 April 1911 in the village of Daqadus in the district of Mit Ghamr in the province of Daqahliyya, in the land of Egypt. He completed the memorisation of the Noble Qur'an in the village Qur'an school at the age of eleven. His father enrolled him in the Azhari primary school in Zagazig in 1926. Next, he entered the Azhari secondary school, receiving his leaving certificate in 1936. He enrolled the College of Arabic in 1937 and obtained the Higher Arabic Language Faculty degree in 1941, finally obtaining his International Teaching Permit in 1943.

He began his scholarly life as a teacher in the Azhari Institute of Tanta; then he taught in the institute of Alexandria; then at the Institute of Zagazig; and then he returned to the Institute of Tanta for a second time. In 1951 he gained a postion as a teacher of *tafsir* and *hadith* in the Shari'ah Faculty at King 'Abd al-'Aziz University in Makka where he stayed for some years. After his return from Saudi Arabia, he was appointed a deputy director of the Azhari Institute of Tanta. He was appointed to the post of Director of Islamic Da'wa in the Ministry of Awqaf Religious Endowments in the Western region in 1961 and was made Supervisor of Arabic sciences at al-Azhar in 1962. In 1964 the Chief Imam, Shaykh Hasan Ma'mun, Shaykh of al-Azhar, selected him as director of his department.

Shaykh al-Sha'rawi was sent as head of the Azhari mission in Algeria after it gained independence in 1966, and during his period there oversaw the implementation of out-teaching methods of Arabic. In 1970 he was appointed visiting professor at the Shari'ah College at King 'Abd al-Aziz University in Makka and then became head of the Higher Studies Section there until 1972.

In 1973 the light of Shaykh Imam Muhammad Mitwalli ash-Sha'rawi beamed out as a precious Islamic beacon, first from

Egyptian television screens and then from screens throughout the Arab world, and his light was one by which Allah guided many people. His weekly Friday appearance was a day of celebration for the many who loved him and followed him, the kind of day on which mercy descends and of which Allah Almighty boasts to His angels.

Mamduh Salim, the former prime minister of Egypt, chose al-Sha'rawi to be the Minister of Awqaf in 1976, and he was reappointed Minister of Awqaf and Minister of Azhar Affairs in Mamduh Salim's cabinet reshuffle in 1977. After having done so much for his nation, he considered it best for both himself and his mission to be entirely free to convey the message of his Lord, and he resigned from ministerial duties on 15 October 1978. The late President Muhammad Anwar as-Sadat awarded him the First Class Medal of Merit in 1976.

Once he was free of the restrictions imposed by ministerial office, he travelled extensively throughout the world, calling people to Allah Almighty with wisdom and good admonition, clarifying the generosity and balanced position of Islam and refuting the false conceptions with which some people had tried to sully it. He visited India in 1977, Pakistan in 1978, the U.K. in 1977, the USA in 1983 and Canada in 1983, and travelled to many other European and Asian lands as well, carrying in his heart the Book of Allah Almighty and the *Sunna* of His Messenger ﷺ, performing the duty of conveying the message of Islam from his Almighty Lord and His Messenger ﷺ.

Al-Shar'awi was appointed a member of the Islamic Consultancy Council in 1980 and elected as a member of the Academy of Arabic Language in Cairo in 1987. President Muhammad Hosni Mubarak, gave him the First Class Medal of the Republic in 1988 and in the same year he received the Dubai international award for service to the Noble Qur'an. He was also awarded the First Class Medal of Shaykh Zayed. The Chain of Honour of the Republic of Egypt was awarded to him posthumously by President Muhammad Hosni Mubarak in 1998.

Shaykh al-Sha'rawi died on the 17th June 1998 at his home near the Pyramids, and was buried in his birthplace of Daqadus. His burial was attended by massive crowds and the village had to

expand to receive the millions of visitors who wanted to bid farewell to their shaykh on his way to his final resting-place. Al-Azhar set up pavilions in the Maydan al-Husayn in Cairo to receive condolences and these were visited by many Arab, Islamic, popular and official delegations.

The greatest gift Shaykh Muhammad Mitwalli ash-Sha'rawi gave to his Arab Islamic nation is his reflections on the Noble Qur'an, which have been broadcast and published in all parts of the world in video, audio and printed form. The Islamic Library has on its shelves many of his books, covering numerous branches of knowledge, but all of them drink from one inexhaustible, pure fountain and spring: his *tafsir* of the Qur'an. This *tafsir* was given in the form of lessons and lectures and was published as a continuous series, going through the Immense Qur'an from beginning to end. His other books are all a contemporary commentary on verses of the Qur'an, collected with great care, arranged with great precision, and subjected to a fine process of revision.

Before he died, the Shaykh gave the sole rights for the publishing of his books to two publishing companies: Maktabat at-Turath al-Islami and Dar al-Akhbar. His heirs confirmed these rights after his death. That is why all books ascribed to him published by publishing houses other than Maktabat at-Turath al-Islami and Dar al-Akhbar are today not considered genuine. As the Shaykh himself said, "Even if they are correct in some respects, they err in others."

Tawhid is the Key to Paradise

In the Name of Allah and peace and blessing be upon His Messenger.

Allah – glory be to Him and exalted is He – has specified the value of testifying that Divinity belongs to Him alone. No one who testifies that there is no god but Allah will remain forever in Hell. There is a vast difference between those who believe in Allah and those who disbelieve in Him. Muslims whose evil deeds outweigh their good deeds will only be punished in Hellfire according to the extent of their acts of disobedience, that is if Allah does not cover them with His mercy and pardon them in spite of what they have done, or if they do not benefit from the intercession of the intercessors. Allah Almighty says:

> *"As for those who are wretched, they will be in the Fire where they will sigh and gasp, remaining in it timelessly, for ever, as long as the heavens and earth endure, except as your Lord wills. Your Lord is the Doer of what He wills. As for those who are glad, they will be in Paradise, remaining in it timelessly, for ever, as long as the heavens and earth endure: an uninterrupted gift."* (11:106-108)

Many *hadiths* have been reported about the excellence of the testimony of *tawhid*. Abu Hurayra ﷺ said, "I asked, 'Messenger of Allah, who will be the most fortunate of those who will enjoy your intercession on the Day of Rising?' The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'Abu Hurayra, I do not know of anyone asking about me about this before you and that is because of what I see of your eagerness for *hadith*. The most fortunate of those who receive my intercession on the Day of Rising will be the ones who say, "There is no god but Allah" sincerely to themselves.'" (al-Bukhari, Ahmad and an-Nasa'i)

Abu Sa'id al-Khudri ﷺ related that the Prophet ﷺ said, "Musa ﷺ said, 'Lord, teach me something by means of which I can remember You and call on You.' He said, 'Say, "There is no god but Allah."' He said, 'Lord, all Your slaves say that.' He said, 'Say, "There is no god but Allah."' [Allah] said, 'I want something especially for myself.' He said, 'Musa, if the seven heavens and the seven earths were in one pan of a balance and "There is no god but Allah" in the other one, the one with "There is no god but Allah" would be the heavier.'" (an-Nasa'i, Ibn Hibban, and al-Hakim)

Jabir related that the Prophet ﷺ said, "The best *dhikr* is 'There is no god but Allah' and the best supplication is 'Praise be to Allah.'" (at-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, an-Nasa'i, Ibn Hibban and al-Hakim) At-Tabarani transmitted from Zayd ibn Arqam ﷺ that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Whoever says, 'There is no god but Allah' sincerely will enter Paradise." He was asked, "What does sincerity consist in?" He answered, "In shunning the things which Allah has forbidden."

Abu Hurayra ﷺ reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "No one says, 'There is no god but Allah' with sincerity without the gates of heaven being opened for him, enabling him to reach the Throne, as long as he has avoided major wrong actions." (at-Tirmidhi) He also related that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Renew your faith." He was asked, "Messenger of Allah, how do we renew our faith?" He answered, "By saying 'There is no god but Allah' often." (Ahmad and al-Hakim)

Ya'la ibn Shaddad related from Abu Shaddad ibn Aws, while 'Ubada ibn as-Samit was present to verify his words: "We were with the Prophet ﷺ when he asked, 'Is there a stranger among you?' meaning any People of the Book. We said, 'No, Messenger of Allah.' He commanded that the door be shut and then said, 'Raise your hands and say, "There is no god but Allah."' We raised out hands for a time. Then he said, 'Praise be to Allah. O Allah, You sent me with this statement and commanded me to say it, and promised me Paradise in return for it. You do not break Your promise.' Then he said, 'Shall I give you good news? Allah has forgiven you.'" (Ahmad and al-Hakim)

'Uthman ibn 'Affan ﷺ related that he heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say, "I know a statement which, if any person says it truly from his heart, will make it forbidden for Hellfire to touch him." 'Umar ibn al-Khattab ﷺ said, "I will tell you what it is. It is the statement of sincerity which Allah Almighty made obligatory for Muhammad ﷺ and His Companions. It is the statement of *taqwa* which the Prophet of Allah ﷺ offered his uncle Abu Talib when he was dying. It is the testimony that there is no god but Allah.'" (Ahmad and al-Hakim) Ahmad and al-Bazzar transmitted from Mu'adh ibn Jabal ﷺ that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "The key to Paradise is to testify that there is no god but Allah."

Ahmad related from 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ﷺ that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "When the Prophet of Allah Nuh ﷺ was dying, he said to his son: 'These are my instructions for you. I enjoin two things on you and forbid you two things. What I enjoin on you is the phrase 'There is no god but Allah'. If the seven heavens and seven earths were placed in one pan and 'There is no god but Allah' was placed in the other, it would outweigh them. If the seven heavens and seven earths were a dark ring, they would be cut by 'There is no god but Allah'. The second thing I enjoin on you is the phrase 'Glory be to Allah and by His praise.' It is the prayer of every thing and through it every thing receives its provision. The two things I forbid you are *shirk* and pride.'" Someone said, 'Messenger of Allah. We know what *shirk* is but what is pride? Is it that that one of us has a fine robe which he wears?' 'No,' he replied. 'Is it that one of us has two excellent sandals with excellent straps?' 'No,' he answered. He was asked, 'Is it that one of us has a mount which he rides?' 'No,' he replied. Another asked, 'Is it that one of us has people who sit around him?' He answered, 'No.' Someone then asked, 'Messenger of Allah, so what is pride?' He said, 'Deprecating the Real and having contempt for other people.'" (Ahmad)

Ibn 'Umar ﷺ related that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "The people of 'There is no god but Allah' suffer no distress in their graves or at their resurrection. I can almost see the people of 'There is no god but Allah' having the dust removed from their faces as they say, *'Praise be to Allah who has removed all sadness from us.'* (35:34)" (Ibn Abi ad-Dunya) It is related from 'Abdullah ibn

'Amr ﷺ that the Prophet ﷺ said, "'Glory be to Allah' fills up half the balance and 'Praise be to Allah fills up the other half. There is no barrier in the way of 'There is no god but Allah' until it reaches Him." (at-Tirmidhi and Ahmad)

'Ubada ibn as-Samit ﷺ related that the Prophet ﷺ said, "If anyone says, 'I testify that there is no god but Allah alone with no partner and that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger, and that 'Isa is the slave of Allah and the son of his female slave and His word which He cast into Maryam and a spirit from Him, and that Paradise is real and Hell is real, Allah will admit him by any of the eight gates of Paradise he wishes." (al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Anas ﷺ related that the Prophet ﷺ said, while Mu'adh was riding behind him on his camel, "O Mu'adh ibn Jabal!" He said, "At your service, Messenger of Allah!" three times. He said, "There is no one who testifies that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah truthfully from his heart but that Allah will make him unlawful to the Fire." He said, "Messenger of Allah, should I not tell the people that so that they might rejoice?" Then he answered, "Then they would rely on that." (al-Bukhari and Muslim) Rifa'a al-Juhani ﷺ related that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "I testify by Allah that if someone testifies that there is no god but Allah and that I am the Messenger of Allah truthfully from his heart and then goes straight, he will go to Paradise." (Ahmad)

'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'As ﷺ related that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Allah will bring forth a man of my community at the heads of people on the Day of Rising and will spread out ninety-nine scrolls above him, each scroll extending as far as the eye can see. Then He will ask, 'Do you deny any of this? Have my recording angels wronged you?' He will answer, 'No, O Lord.' He will ask, 'Do you have anything to offer in mitigation.' He will say, 'No, O Lord.' Allah Almighty will say, 'Yes, you do have a good action in Our sight. You will not be wronged today.' A small paper will be produced which has the words 'I testify that there is no god but Allah and I testify that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger' on it. [Allah] will say, 'Attend your weighing.' The man will ask, 'Lord, what is this small paper in comparison to

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these scrolls?' He will say, 'You will not be wronged.' The scrolls will be put in one pan, and the paper in one pan and the scrolls will be lighter and the paper heavier. Nothing outweighs the Name of Allah." (at-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, Ahmad, Ibn Hibban and al-Hakim)]

The phrase "*except as your Lord wills*" is found in both of the *ayats* quoted at the beginning of this section. This exception applies to both those who believe in Allah and also to those who disobey Him. An exception is used to indicate something which differs from the general rule. One says, for instance, "The people stood up except for so-and-so." It means so-and-so is excluded from the rest of the people he was sitting with because he did not stand up with them. He differed from what they did. The preposition "*illa*" (except) is used either to negate something otherwise confirmed or to confirm something otherwise negated. If we say, "The people stood up except for Zayd," we negate Zayd's standing up. If we say, "The people did not stand up except for Zayd," we confirm Zayd's standing up.

Speaking about His creation in the Next World Allah Almighty says: "*On the Day it comes, no soul will speak except by His permission. Some of them will be wretched and others glad.*" (11:105) Allah Almighty divides humankind into two categories – the damned and the fortunate – and explains to us the judgment covering both categories. But there are two types of wretchedness: the wretchedness of the unbeliever, which is absolute wretchedness, and the wretchedness of a believer who transgresses against himself and disobeys his Lord. These two types of wretchedness are requited differently because the statement of *tawhid* receives its reward in the Next World. There are also two types of gladness: the absolute gladness of a person who believes and does righteous actions, and the gladness of someone who believes and performs some righteous actions but who is at the same time, negligent or lazy about the rest, not out of a desire to disobey nor from a refusal to obey. Allah may forgive such people as these, either by the direct application of His mercy or the intercession of intercessors.

Those who are wretched through their disbelief will be in Hell forever from the very beginning and will never emerge from it.

The punishment will never be lightened for them and the intercession of intercessors will not help them. Those, on the other hand, who are wretched on account of their disobedience in respect of their obligations will first enter Hell to be punished according to the extent of their disobedience and then after that will be admitted into Paradise. This is the exception referred to in the words of the Almighty "*except as your Lord wills*" in the first *ayat*. The exception here occurs at the end of a period of punishment. In other words those who are wretched, whether through disbelief or disobedience, will all begin the punishment together; but unlike the unbelievers, the disobedient will not remain in Hell forever. The mercy of Allah Almighty will reach them and He will eventually bring them out of it and admit them to Paradise.

So in the case of those who do not enter Paradise straight away but go to Hell for the first period of their afterlives, the exception regarding wretchedness refers to the end of their punishment, not to their entering Hell. The exception regarding gladness is at the beginning of entering Paradise. As we said, the believers will stand with Allah, both the wretched and the fortunate, because all believed in the oneness of Allah. Allah will ask them about their faith and all will say that they are righteous believers. But Allah Almighty says:

> "*On the Day when legs are bared and they are called upon to prostrate, they will not be able to do so. Their eyes will be downcast, darkened by debasement; for they were called on to prostrate while they were in full possession of their faculties.*" (68:42-43)

If we want to understand the meaning of these two noble *ayats*, we must first grasp the meaning of the phrase "*the legs are bared*". The Arabs used to use baring the leg as a metaphor for making a great effort, and the words are not used lightly in this context. That is because when a man want to do some serious hard physical work, he often raises his garment and exposes his legs so that the garment will not get in the way of the vigorous movement which such action demands. So the phrase "baring the legs" is used in respect of serious situations. At such times, one says, "I bared my legs and did such-and-such." This situation on the Day of

Resurrection we are discussing here is one requiring great effort. So the meaning of "On the Day when legs are bared" indicates that it is a time of serious tribulation when all will say, "We worshipped and did not disobey."

Ibn Kathir said that Ibn Abi Najih reported from Mujahid that "*The Day when legs are bared*" denotes the severity of the matter. Ibn 'Abbas ﷺ said, "It is the severity of the Hour which will occur on the Day of Rising." Ibn Jarir said that Mujahid said that "*The Day when legs are bared*" refers to the severity and seriousness of the matter. According to al-'Awfi, Ibn 'Abbas ﷺ said about "*The Day when legs are bared*": "It is when the reality is unveiled and actions appear. 'Baring' refers to entering the Next World and being unveiled by it." That is similar to what ad-Dahhak and others related from Ibn 'Abbas. Abu Ja'far ibn Jarir reported all of that, and added that Abu Zayd 'Umar ibn Shayba reported from Harun ibn 'Umar al-Makhzumi from al-Walid ibn Muslim from Abu Sa'id Rawh ibn Janah from a *mawla* of 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-Aziz from Abu Burda ibn Abi Musa from his father ﷺ that the Prophet ﷺ said, "'*The Day when legs are bared*' refers to a great light to which they will prostrate."

Everyone will be told to prostrate to Allah, but only obedient believers will be able to do so. Believers who disobeyed will find that their backs have become like planks of wood which will not bend so they are unable to prostrate. They will try to prostrate, but will not be able to do so. Then they will be told, "You disobeyed; that is why you are unable to prostrate." They will try to argue and will be told, "Will you accept the witnesses against you?" They will look to the right and the left and not see any who could be asked to testify and so will be hopeful and say, "Yes, we will accept their testimony," expecting to be saved by that. Then their skins, hands, feet and tongues will testify against them. The Almighty tells us: "*When they reach it, their hearing, sight and skin will testify against them concerning what they did. They will ask their skins, 'Why did you testify against us?' and they will reply, 'Allah gave us speech as He has given speech to everything.'*" (41:20-21)

Then the disobedient will experience retribution for what they have done. Allah Almighty describes their state and says: "*Their eyes will be downcast, darkened by debasement.*" Those people did not

keep up their prayers and did not perform them at the prescribed times. Allah says: "For they were called on to prostate while they were in full possession of their faculties." This means that they were called to the prayer, either by hearing the *adhan* or being told of the times of prayer. They were able to prostrate, but neglected to do it and wasted the opportunity and did not persevere in their prayers while they had the chance to do so.

There is no key that does not have teeth

Ibn al-Qayyim says that al-Bukhari mentions in his *Sahih* that Wahb ibn Munabbih was asked, "Is not the key to the Paradise 'There is no god but Allah'?" He answered, "Yes, but there is no key that does not have teeth. If you bring a key with teeth, it will be opened for you. Otherwise it will not." (al-Bukhari) Allah – glory be to Him! – appointed a key to everything desirable by which it can be opened. He made the key to prayer purification, as the Prophet ﷺ made clear with his words: "The key to prayer is purification." The key to *hajj* is *ihram*. The key to piety is truthfulness. The key to Paradise is *tawhid*. The key to knowledge is good asking and good listening. The key to victory and success is patience. The key to increase is thankfulness. The key to *wilaya* is love and dhikr. The key to true prosperity is *taqwa*. The key to success is desire and fear. The key to being answered is supplication. The key to desire for the Next World is asceticism in this world.

The key to faith is reflection about what Allah calls His servants to reflect on. The key to coming to Allah is the submission of the heart and its finding safety in Him and sincerity to Him in love and hatred, action and non-action. The key to the life of the heart is reflecting on the Qur'an, humble entreaty before dawn and abandoning wrong actions. The key to obtaining mercy is being correct in worship of the Creator and striving to benefit His servants. The key to provision is striving in asking forgiveness and *taqwa*. The key to might is obeying Allah and His Messenger. The key to preparation for the Next World is curtailing hopes of this one. The key to all good is desire for Allah and the Next Abode. The key to every evil is love of this world and excessive hopes.

This is a vast topic and one of the most beneficial fields of knowledge. In it lies recognition of the keys to good and evil. Success in recognising them is only achieved by someone one possessed of great good fortune. Allah Almighty has appointed a key and a door to every good and evil. He made *shirk*, pride, shunning

what Allah sent His Messenger with, and negligence in remembering Him and undertaking what He is due, keys to Hell. Similarly He made wine a key to every sin, and transgression a key to fornication. He made the lingering glance at created things a key to greed and lust. He made laziness and rest a key to disappointment and deprival. He made acts of disobedience a key to disbelief. He made lying a key to hypocrisy. He made avarice and greed a key to miserliness, cutting off kin and usurping illicit property. He made turning away from what the Messenger brought the key to every innovation and misguidance. These things can only be verified by someone who has sound insight and an intellect by which he recognises them in himself and in the rest of existence. So one must be deeply concerned with recognising these keys and what they are keys to. And all praise is due to Allah and all success is by Him.

The slaughtering of death between Paradise and Hell

Abu Sa'id al-Khudri ﷺ reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Death will be brought on the Day of Rising in the shape of a horned ram and will be made to stand between Paradise and Hell; and it will be said, 'People of Paradise, do you recognise this?' They will raise their heads and look and say, 'Yes, this is death.' The command will come for it to be slaughtered. Then it will be said, 'People of Paradise! Eternity with no death! People of Hell! Eternity with no death.'" Then the Messenger of Allah ﷺ recited, "*Warn them of the Day of Bitter Regret when the matter will be resolved. But they will take no notice; they do not believe.*"(19:39) (Muslim)

Ibn 'Umar ﷺ related that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Allah will admit the people of Paradise to Paradise and the people of Hell to Hell. Then an announcer will stand between them and say, 'People of Paradise! No death. People of Hell! No death. Each will remain eternally in what he is in.'" (al-Bukhari and Muslim) Ibn 'Umar ﷺ also related that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "When the people of Paradise go to Paradise and the people of the Hell to Hell, death will be brought and placed between Hell and Paradise. Then a caller will call out, 'People of Paradise, no death! People of Hell, no death!' The people of Paradise will be even more joyful and the people of Hell will have sorrow on top of their sorrow." (Muslim)

Abu Hurayra ﷺ reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "When Allah admits the people of Paradise to Paradise and the people of Hell to Hell, death will be brought and be made to stand on the walls between the people of Paradise and the people of Hell. Then a voice will say, 'People of Paradise!' They will look up in fear. And a voice will say, 'People of Hell!' They will look up in joy hoping for intercession. The people of Paradise and the people of Hell will be asked, 'Do you recognise this?' Both groups will

say, 'We recognise it. It is death who was given authority over us.' It will be made to lie down and will be slaughtered on the walls between Paradise and Hell. Then it will be said, 'People of Paradise! Eternity with no death! People of Hell! Eternity with no death!'" (at-Tirmidhi and an-Nasa'i)

Entering Paradise is only through the mercy of Allah Almighty

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Seek what is balanced and correct and draw near. Receive good news. No one will enter it by means of his actions." They said, "Not even you, Messenger of Allah?" He said, "Not even me, unless Allah covers me with forgiveness and mercy." Al-Bukhari transmitted it from 'A'isha ؓ. Abu Hurayra ؓ also transmitted that the Prophet ﷺ said, "None of you will saved by his actions." They said, "Not even you, Messenger of Allah?" He said, "Not even me, unless Allah covers me with mercy. Seek what is balanced and correct and draw near, doing so in the morning and the evening and part of the night. Moderation! Cling to moderation and you will arrive." Ibn Hajar stated in *Fath al-Bari* that the meaning of "will be saved" is "delivered". Being saved from something is being delivered from it.

Ibn Battal said when he combined this hadith with the words of the Almighty: "*This is your Paradise which you have inherited for what you did*" (7:43): "The upshot of that is that you apply the *ayat* to mean that the specific Paradise one ends up in will be on account one's actions. The degrees of Paradise vary according to one's actions. The can be taken simply to mean entering Paradise as a whole and being in it forever, as in the words of the Almighty: '*Peace be upon you! Enter Paradise for what you did.*' (16:32) Allah clearly states here that admission to Paradise is through one's actions. The answer to this is that it is a general expression which is qualified by this hadith. What is implied is: 'Enter particular dwellings and castles in Paradise on account of what you did.' It does not mean simply entering it."

Then he said: "It is permitted for this hadith to explain the *ayat*. What is implied is: 'Enter it through what you were doing by Allah's mercy and favour to you, because the allocation of the houses of Paradise is by His mercy and the basis for entering Paradise is the mercy shown by Him in inspiring you to act in

such a way that you achieve that. All His rewards to His slaves are subject to His mercy and favour. He was gracious to them at first by bringing them into existence and then by providing for them and then by teaching them."

'Iyad said, "The hadith explains what is undefined in the *ayat*." He mentioned something similar to Ibn Battal, saying that part of Allah's mercy is His giving people success in acting rightly and guiding people to obedience. The merit for the action does not belong to the one who acts. It is purely by the grace and mercy of Allah.

According to Ibn al-Jawzi there are four explanations:

1. Success in action is entirely a matter of the mercy of Allah. If it were not for the prior mercy of Allah, no one would obtain the faith and obedience through which salvation is achieved.

2. The profits from a slave belong to his master and so the master is entitled to the fruits of his work. Any reward Allah gives someone is, therefore, part of His bounty to him.

3. There are hadiths which make it clear that admission to the Garden is a matter of the mercy of Allah whereas the allocation of degrees within the Garden is according to the actions of the slave.

4. The acts of obedience of the slave all occur within in a very short space of time, whereas the reward for them goes on forever. Bliss which never ends in repayment for something very short-lived is an act of grace, not in any way commensurate with what brought it about.

Al-Kirmani said, "The prepositional use of the letter *ba'* in his words "***bima kuntum ta'malun***" (for what you did), is not causative, but rather denotes connection or association. It means that they inherit Paradise along with their actions or accompanied by them, or as compensation for them, as in the statement "I will give you a sheep for a dirham." Shaykh Jamal ad-Din ibn Hisham confirmed this position in *al-Mughni*, saying that the *ba'* denotes compensation, which includes exchange, as when you buy something for a thousand being an example of that, Allah's words, "*Enter Paradise for what* (bima) *you did.*" (16:31) There the *ba'* is not causative as the Mu'tazilites claimed [in their belief that entering Paradise is purely in return for actions]. It is as everyone else says about "None of you will enter Paradise by his actions," because someone

who gives a recompense may do so without expecting anything in return – and this differs both from something brought about by a cause and also from something which has no cause whatsoever. That removes any possibility of disparity between the *ayat* and the hadith.

Ibn al-Qayyim has previously dealt with this matter, saying in his book, *Miftah Dar as-Sa'ada*: "The *ba'* which brings about entry into Paradise is not the *ba'* of the past tense. That would denote causality, which would imply that the actions brought about the admission in the same way that causes automatically produce effects. The second usage is that it occurs by way of recompense, as when I buy something from someone in exchange for something else. Therefore the upshot of it is that admission to Paradise is not in repayment for someone's actions and if it were not for the mercy of Allah to His slave, He would not admit him to Paradise.

"Finite actions could never warrant automatic entry into Paradise which is infinite nor could Paradise be repayment for those actions because, even if they are done in a manner which Allah loves, they could never be equal to Allah's blessings. Indeed, all the actions of a human being would not equal even a single Divine blessing, and so the rest of Allah's blessings call for gratitude; and still no one is able to show sufficient gratitude for them. If Allah were to punish anyone in this state, He would do so without wronging them and if He shows mercy to them in this state, His mercy far outweighs the person's actions, as is stated in the hadith of Ubayy ibn Ka'b, which Abu Dawud and Ibn Majah transmitted about the Decree: "If Allah were to punish all the people of His heavens and earth, He would not wrong them by doing so. If He shows mercy to them, His mercy is better for them."

Ibn Qayyim adds, "This is a definitive refutation of the Jabariyya who deny that actions have anything to do with entering Paradise at all, and the Qadariyya, who claim that Paradise is repayment for actions – and that they are its price and one enters it purely through actions. The hadith invalidates the claim of both groups. Allah knows best."

It is clear to me that there is another resolution of the apparent difference between the *ayat* and the hadith: it is that the hadith

conveys the fact that action, inasmuch as it is action, can only help the doer of it to enter Paradise if it is accepted by Allah. That being the case, the matter is entirely in the hands of Allah Almighty and admission to Paradise can only be gained by Allah's mercy, shown in His acceptance of a person's actions. That is the meaning of *"Enter Paradise for what you did,"* i.e. for the actions you did which were accepted by Allah. Thus the *ba'* may be considered connective or associative or recompensatory and is not necessarily causative at all.

An-Nawawi states that the literal meaning of *ayats* such as this is that admission to Paradise is on account of actions and, combining them with the hadith, what is meant is that success in actions and guidance to sincerity in them and their acceptance is entirely by the mercy and grace of Allah. So it is correct that one does not enter Paradise merely by actions; and that is what the hadith makes clear. It may also be correct that admission to Paradise does take place on account of actions and that that is out of the mercy of Allah, although al-Kirmani says that this understanding is contrary to the literal meaning of the hadith.

Al-Mazini says: "The people of the *Sunna* believe that Allah Almighty rewards those who obey Him by a favour from Him. That is also true of His revenge on those who disobey Him, who are punished by His justice. Both of these are only confirmed by what we have heard. The Almighty is perfectly able to punish the obedient and bless the rebellious; but He tells us that He does not do that, and His word is true. This hadith reinforces their position and refutes the questioner who asks, 'If this is the truth, why then is there any reckoning at all? People do not enter Paradise through their actions, so why are righteous actions a precondition for entering Paradise? Are there not those who say that Allah Almighty will admit to Paradise whomever He wishes simply by His mercy?' We reply to such people: 'You have failed to understand the meaning of the hadith of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ; it is that righteous deeds do not increase the sovereignty of Allah Almighty in any way and that righteous deeds, however great they may be, can never be equal to the blessings which Allah Almighty has brought into existence – those of this world, let alone the

Next. The blessings which Allah has granted are far superior to any righteous actions in this world, however magnificent they may be.'"

It is said that once there was a servant of Allah who used to worship Allah night and day and never ceased in his prayer, glorification, bowing and prostration, until, when his time came, he actually died in prostration. When the Reckoning came on the Day of Rising, he was told, "Enter Paradise by the mercy of Allah." He said, "Rather I will enter Paradise by my actions!" So they brought the scales and put all the righteous actions of the worshipper in one pan and the blessing of sight alone in the other, and the blessing of sight outweighed all of them. The man said, "I will enter Paradise by the mercy of Allah." So the righteous deeds which a person does in this world, however many they may be, are not equal to a single blessing from Allah Almighty.

When a believer follows the Path of Allah, no action he does is of any benefit to Allah. No, the benefit of following the Path of Allah is simply for the person who does it. It gives him a good life in this world and protects him from any evils which would have happened to him had he not followed it. As we said before, the Path protects those who follow it and transports them from a jungle existence to a life of safety and tranquillity.

Finally, it is like saying to your son, "Study hard so that you pass your exam." The passing is the recompense. Studying does not benefit the father but it will benefit the son in the future. It increases his opportunities so that he will be able to earn a better living and take a higher position in society. So the benefit of studying goes to the son and is of no use to the father. If the father gives a reward to his son for passing, that is simply a favour from the father to his son. Likewise, Allah Almighty set out the path for our benefit; He did not set it out to achieve any benefit for Himself. So when you pray your prayer, it does not benefit Allah. The benefit comes back to you since you are fulfilling your obligation of worship. As a result Allah is with you to help you in times of hardship, to shield you in times of disgrace, and to provide for you in times of difficulty.

The prayer which you performed opens the door for you to stand before Allah Almighty. You asked for this and hoped for it

and you will be in His sublime Presence. So who benefits? You, of course! So it is clear that righteous action only benefits the person who does it. The position on the Day of Rising, however, is that all of a person's righteous actions are not equal to a single one of the blessings of Allah Almighty. What then is the purpose of the Reckoning? We say that it lies in the fact that Allah Almighty made these righteous actions a precondition for His favour and mercy: if you do not first perform these righteous actions in this world, you do not deserve to be among those who deserve the favour and mercy of Allah in the Next World. So in order to obtain favour and mercy, you must first perform righteous actions. If you do not do so, then all of this will be denied to you.

That is the meaning of the hadith of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ: "No one will enter Paradise through his actions." It means: when these righteous actions are placed in the balance, they will not admit the one who did them to Paradise, but they are a precondition for Allah embracing him with His mercy, enabling him to enter Paradise, and Allah will pour out whatever He wishes of His favour on him. We must be aware of the fact that Allah Almighty has made this favour clear to us in this world, letting us know that good actions are multiplied by ten to seven hundred times.

Evil deeds, on the other hand, are only repaid with their like, and on top of that we have repentance and Allah's forgiveness and mercy to efface many of them. If it was only a matter of Allah's justice, evil deeds would be equal to good deeds – and the forgiveness and mercy of Allah would not efface and remove evil deeds. But Allah Almighty wanted to let us know that He is gracious to us in His dealings with us in this world. If He dealt with us strictly by His justice, everyone in the world would be destroyed on account of their wrong actions, as is affirmed by the words of the Almighty: *"If Allah were to take mankind to task for what they earned, He would not leave a single creature crawling on it."* (35:45)

If Allah Almighty shows us favour in this world, the favour He shows us in the Next World is even more general and comprehensive. Every blessing of Allah in Paradise is part of Allah's grace to us and is not a right we have earned. When the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, who is the perfect model in faith and righteous action,

and is protected by Allah Almighty, said in the hadith, "not even me," he was stressing to us that however many righteous actions a person does, he still needs the favour of Allah to enter Paradise. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ performed more good actions than anyone else and was more obedient than any of us and the closest of us to Allah Almighty, yet in spite of all these qualities the Messenger will only enter Paradise by the mercy of Allah. So it is not correct for anyone to claim or say that he will enter Paradise through his actions. Rather all of us are in need of the favour and mercy of Allah. That favour is what wipes out our evil deeds and multiplies our good deeds many times over.

Paradise exists here and now

Allah Almighty says:

"It is He who produces gardens, both cultivated and wild, and palm trees and crops of diverse kinds, and olives and pomegranates, both similar and dissimilar. Eat of their fruits when they bear fruit and pay their due on the day of their harvest, and do not be profligate. He does not love the profligate." (6:141)

"Produces" here means "brings into existence by originating", there being no prior model. There were no models or means to assist Allah Almighty. The Almighty originated them without a prior model because no creator but Him exists. He is the Creator, the Originator, the Fashioner; there is no god but Him and no Lord except Him.

The word *janna* (garden) denotes a defined place in which there are different types of crops and fruits which give us nourishment. The root meaning of *janna*, the word used for Paradise and the Gardens of the Next World, means a covering or veil, and this is because in a garden tall trees grow, whose many branches intertwine and cover those who enter it. It is also veiled from other places by the fact that it precludes any need for them. It contains all the elements needed to sustain life: food, fruit, grazing, water, greenery, and pleasure. Everything is there and nothing further is needed.

Allah Almighty says about the present existence of Paradise: *"He saw him again another time by the Lote-tree of the Final Limit, beside which is the Garden of Refuge."* (53:13-15) It is confirmed that the Lote-Tree of the Final Limit is above the heavens and it is called that because it is the end-point of what descends from Allah and what rises to Him. The Almighty also says: *"Your provision is in heaven – and what you are promised."* (51:22) According to Ibn Abi Najih, Mujahid said that this refers to Paradise.

In the two *Sahih* collections we find Anas's account of the Night Journey. It says at the end of it: "Then Jibril took me on until he brought me to the Lote-Tree of the Final Limit and colours covered it which I did not recognise. Then I was brought into Paradise, and in it were strings of pearls, and its soil was made of musk."

'Abdullah ibn 'Umar ﷺ related from 'Umar ﷺ that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "When one of you dies, he is shown his destined place morning and evening. If he is one of the people of Paradise, he is among the people of Paradise. If he is one of the people of Hell, he is among the people of Hell. It is said, 'This will be your place when Allah resurrects you to it on the Day of Rising.'" (Al-Bukhari, Muslim, at-Tirmidhi, an-Nasa'i and Ahmad) Al-Bara' ibn 'Azib ﷺ said, "We went out with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ for the funeral of one of the Ansar..." In that hadith it says: "A caller will call from heaven: 'My slave was truthful, so make a place for him in Paradise, clothe him from Paradise and open to him a door to Paradise.'" He said, "He will be brought some of its sweet basil and scent." (Ahmad, al-Hakim and Abu Dawud)

Anas ibn Malik ﷺ related that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "When someone is placed in his grave and his companions turn and go and he can hear the tread of their sandals, two angels come to him and make him sit up and say to him, 'What do you say about this man?' The believer will say, 'I testify that he is the slave of Allah and His Messenger.' He will be told, 'Look at your place in Hell; Allah has given you, in exchange for it, a place in Paradise.'" The Prophet of Allah ﷺ said, "He will see both of them." (Abu Dawud)

'Abdullah ibn 'Iyad ﷺ said, "The sun was eclipsed in the time of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ," and he narrated the hadith. In it the Prophet ﷺ said, "The sun and the moon are two of the signs of Allah. They do not eclipse for the life or death of anyone. When you see them, remember Allah." They said, "Messenger of Allah, we saw you reach out for something while you were standing here and then we saw you draw back." The Prophet ﷺ said, "I saw Paradise and I reached out for a bunch of grapes from it; and, if I had taken it, you would have been able to eat from it for as long as

this world lasted. Then I saw Hellfire and I have never seen anything more hideous than what I saw today; and I saw that most of its people were women." They asked, "Why, Messenger of Allah?" He answered, "Because of their ingratitude." Someone asked, "Are they ungrateful to Allah?" He said, "They are ungrateful to their husbands and ungrateful for good treatment. Even if you were to behave well to one of them for a whole lifetime and she were to see you do one thing (that she did not like) she would say that she had never seen anything good from you." (al-Bukhari, Muslim and an-Nasa'i)

Ka'b ibn Malik ﷺ related that Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "The soul of the believer is a bird perching in a tree of Paradise until he returns to his body on the day he is resurrected." (Ibn Majah) Abu Hurayra ﷺ reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "When Allah Almighty created Paradise and Hell, He sent Jibril to Paradise and said, 'Look at it and at what I have prepared for its people in it.' He went to it and looked at it and at what Allah had prepared for its people in it and returned to Him and said, 'By Your might, no one will hear of it but that he will enter it.' So Allah commanded it to be encircled by distasteful things. He said, 'Return to it.' He found it surrounded by distasteful things and returned to Allah and said, 'By Your might, I fear that no one will enter it.' He said, 'Go to Hell and look at it and what I have prepared for its people in it.' It was in layers, some on top of others. He returned to Him and said, 'By Your might, no one who hears about it will enter it.' Allah commanded it to be surrounded by sensual appetites and then said, 'Return to it.' He returned to it and said, 'By Your might, I fear that no one will be saved from it and all will enter it.'" (at-Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud, an-Nasa'i and Ahmad) Abu Hurayra ﷺ said, "Hell is veiled by sensual appetites and Paradise veiled by things people find distasteful." (al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Abu Hurayra ﷺ related that the Prophet ﷺ said, "Hell and Paradise argued, and Hell said, 'I was selected for the arrogant and proud.' Paradise said, 'Only weak, lowly and powerless people will enter Me.' Allah Almighty said to Paradise, 'You are My mercy. I show mercy by you to whomever I wish of My slaves.' He said to Hell, 'You are My punishment, I will punish by You whomever I

wish of My slaves. Each of you will have its fill.' The Fire will not be filled. He will put His foot in it and it will say, 'Enough! Enough!' Then it will be filled and its parts will come together." (al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Anas ﷺ reported that the Prophet ﷺ said, "While I was travelling in Paradise I came to a river whose banks were domes of hollowed-out pearls. I asked, 'What is this, Jibril?' He replied, 'This is Kawthar, which your Lord has given You. Its mud (or scent) is fragrant musk." (al-Bukhari and Ahmad) Jabir ibn 'Abdullah ﷺ reported that he heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say, "I entered Paradise and saw in it a house or a castle and asked, 'Who is it for?' They answered, 'For 'Umar ibn al-Khattab.' I wanted to enter it, but I remembered your jealousy.' 'Umar wept and said, 'Messenger of Allah, would I be jealous of you?'" (Muslim and Ahmad) Jabir ﷺ related that the Prophet ﷺ said, 'If anyone says, 'Glory be to Allah the Immense, and by His praise,' a palm-tree is planted for him in Paradise." (at-Tirmidhi)]

Paradise is promised by Allah to the believers

Allah Almighty says:

> *"As for those who believe and do right actions, We will admit them into Gardens with rivers flowing under them, remaining in them for ever and ever. Allah's promise is true. Whose speech us truer than Allah's?"* (4:122)

Anyone who is certain and confident about the absolute truthfulness of the words of Allah knows that there is no such thing as distance where the gift of Allah Almighty is concerned. An example of how that is the case can be seen in a conversation which took place between the Prophet ﷺ and one of his Companions, al-Harith ibn Malik al-Ansari ﷺ. The Prophet ﷺ asked, "How are you this morning, Harith?" The Companion ﷺ replied, "This morning I am truly a believer." This answer was a statement with a profound meaning and was truly faith. That is why the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Look to what you say. Everything has a reality, so what is the reality of your faith?" Harith ﷺ answered, "I have turned away from this world, and as a result I have stayed awake during the night and been thirsty during the day. It is as if I could see the Throne of my Lord emerging and as if I could see the people of Paradise visiting one another in it, and as if I could see the people of the Fire asking one another for help in it." The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Harith, you have truly grasped it, so hold to that," three times. (at-Tabarani)

Allah says: *"We will admit them into Gardens."* (4:57) It is known that when the word "Garden" is mentioned in the Qur'an without any qualification, it refers to the Paradise of the Next World, which is the true Paradise. Gardens of this world may be affected by drought causing leaves to dry up and fall off and the plants and trees in them to shrivel up and perish. Or they may be afflicted by blight and not produce any fruit. The Paradise of the Next World, however, is never failing in its fruitfulness. On the other hand,

when the word "garden" in the Qur'an is limited by some qualification or quality, another meaning is intended, as we find in the words of the Almighty: "*We tried them as We tried the owners of the garden when they swore that they would harvest in the morning.*" (68:17)

In the *ayat* at the beginning of this section, the word is used here in the plural form and Ibn al-Qayyim said concerning that: "The word "Paradise" is a comprehensive term which includes everything it contains as well with respect to gardens, dwellings and palaces. There are many Paradises. Al-Bukhari related in his *Sahih* from Anas ibn Malik that Umm ar-Rubayya' bint al-Bara' ﷺ, the mother of Haritha ibn Suraqa ﷺ, went to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and said, "Prophet of Allah, will you tell me about Haritha?" He had been killed in the Battle of Badr by an arrow from an unknown person. "If he is in Paradise, I will be steadfast. If the case is other than that, I will weep greatly for him." He ﷺ said, "Umm Haritha, there are Paradises within Paradise. Your son is in the highest Paradise." And in the two *Sahih* collections we also find the hadith of Abu Musa al-Ash'ari ﷺ in which the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "There are two Gardens whose utensils and contents are of silver and two Gardens whose utensils and contents are of gold. There is nothing in the Garden of Eden which comes between the people and looking at their Lord except for the Cloak of Greatness over His Face." (al-Bukhari and Muslim) The Almighty says: "*For those who fear the Station of his Lord there are two Gardens*" (55:46), mentioning two Gardens, and then He says: "*Besides those two there will be two other Gardens*" (55:62) so that makes four."

The Almighty says, "*Gardens with rivers flowing under them*" (2:25). By these words Allah puts us completely at our ease since the constant presence of water assures us that these Gardens will always preserve their freshness and greenness, which is the first thing to suffer if the supply of water runs out. This is a promise from Allah Almighty to His believing slaves, the people of righteous actions, along with eternity in Paradise. He says: "*Allah's promise of Allah is true. Whose word can be truer than Allah's?*" (4:122) When the One Whom nothing can prevent carrying out His promise makes a promise to you, that is indeed a true promise.

But when someone who is on the same level as you makes a promise, it is very possible that that promise will not be carried out. Perhaps he will change his mind at the time when the promise is due to be fulfilled, or maybe he will not have the necessary capacity or wealth at that time and so will be unable to fulfil his promise; or his feelings towards you might change. Allah Almighty, on the other hand, is not affected by change, and nothing is beyond His power. There is no other god with Him to countermand him and so His promise is never taken back and is inevitably carried out.

The words of Allah here, "*Allah's promise is true. Whose word can be truer than Allah's?*" are clear to every one of us. They come in the form of a question so that our answer as creatures will be confirmation of the truth of what Allah says. Are there any words truer than those of Allah? The answer naturally is that of course no words can be. Lying is done by someone who wants a benefit for himself which truthfulness will not achieve. Allah Almighty is far removed from any such need! In His words "*Allah's promise*" the word "promise" presages news of good which will arrive at some future time. The word used for news of evil which will arrive at some future time is "threat". Allah's promise therefore encourages the one who hears it to exert himself and act in order to gain the good thing which has been promised him whereas Allah's threat gives the listener the opportunity to stop doing the thing which incurs Allah's anger so that he is safeguarded from the punishment of Allah.

In the Noble Qur'an, however, Allah Almighty says: "*Allah has promised the men and women of the hypocrites...*" (9:68), following that by mentioning the punishment which awaits them He then says, "*Allah has promised the men and of the women believers*" (9:72), following that by describing the bliss which awaits them, despite the fact that, as we have seen, in common usage a promise is about future good whereas an announcement of future evil is called a threat. So one would have expected Allah Almighty to have said, "Allah has threatened the hypocrites", because of the punishment in store for them, and to have reserved the word "promise" for the believers, because of the rich reward in store for them.

when the word "garden" in the Qur'an is limited by some qualification or quality, another meaning is intended, as we find in the words of the Almighty: "*We tried them as We tried the owners of the garden when they swore that they would harvest in the morning.*" (68:17)

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The truth is that Allah's words differ from normal human usage and He uses the word promise, which is ordinarily always used for good, to apply to both the hypocrites and the believers. In the case of the men and women believers the word "promise" is used in the normal way, since what is promised is a good outcome. With respect to the hypocrites, however, Allah Almighty employs the word "promise" in a way different from its normal usage, in a situation with a bad outcome where one would have expected the word "threat" to have been used. We must first understand that the words of Allah Almighty transcend normal language. His words cannot be compared to the words of human beings. That is why it is said in Traditions that there is a difference between the words of Allah and the words of His creatures. Allah uses "promise" instead of "threat" with regard to the men and women hypocrites because, having addressed them, He tells them what their repayment will be if they persist in their hypocrisy as an admonition to them. He alarms them about the punishment which awaits them in order to persuade them to refrain from their hypocrisy and find the good which exists in faith.

By warning them in this way, Allah Almighty is in fact advising them, just as you might tell someone who was negligent in his studies, "You will fail if you neglect your studies." Your intention in doing that is to encourage the person to study, connecting it to the threat of failure so that he will take action to avoid what is threatened. In another place Allah Almighty says: "*He will pursue you with a piercing flame and fiery smoke, and you will not be helped. So which of your Lord's blessings do you both then deny?*" (55:35-36) How can a "piercing flame" be called a blessing? It is a blessing because Allah Almighty is making clear to us what will happen if we turn away from His guidance. Such warnings are a blessing because by them Allah makes us leave the path to Hell and choose the path to Paradise. So when Allah tells the men and women hypocrites of the fate which awaits them, it is in reality good and a blessing for them, because if they pay heed and exchange their hypocrisy for faith, they will save themselves from the punishment of the Fire - and this will certainly be good for them. That is why Allah Almighty uses the word "promise" in this instance. And Allah knows best.

"*Allah's promise of Allah is true. Whose word can be truer than Allah's?*" (4:122) The promise and threat of Allah are different from those of human beings because human beings are subject to change. Someone may promise good and then be unable to deliver it. He may threaten punishment and then, owing to specific circumstances, not have the power to inflict it. Allah Almighty is not like that. In His case the promise and threat come from One who is always Powerful, always Strong, always Existing, the Possessor of the Highest Word, so that nothing exists which can prevent Him from carrying out His promise or fulfilling His threat. That applies to Allah Almighty alone.

One of the proofs of Allah's power and the powerlessness of others is found in the words of the Almighty: "*Ruin to the hands of Abu Lahab and ruin to him! His wealth has not helped Him, nor shall anything he has earned. He will surely burn in a Flaming Fire. And so will his wife, the firewood-carrier, with a rope of twisted fibre around her neck.*" (111:1-5) Allah Almighty decreed in this noble *sura* that Abu Lahab and his wife would die unbelievers and enter Hell. Many of those who were unbelievers at the time of the revelation of this *sura*, such as Khalid ibn al-Walid, 'Ikrima ibn Abi Jahl, 'Amr ibn al-'As and others, became believers and were good Muslims. Abu Lahab and his wife might equally have become Muslim, but Allah Almighty knew from before time that they would not.

Allah decreed that His judgement and promise would be carried out and He knows the affairs of His creation, what is visible of them and what is unseen. When He judges, His judgement is carried out and there is no gainsaying His command. There is no god but Allah. He has power over all things. He alone is God and His command will inevitably be implemented, even in respect of matters which are apparently open to human choice. Allah says in the Qur'an: "*There is no changing His words.*" (18:27) When He promises good, His promise will certainly be fulfilled. When He makes a threat of evil, it will certainly occur.

This matter of the ineluctable promise and threat of Allah Almighty, which cannot be gainsaid, is essential for His purpose for human life to be properly realised. Allah has a *sunna* in existence; He makes things happen in certain predictable ways. If you

till the earth, prepare it properly, place seeds in it and water it well, the result will be a good harvest. If you neglect the land and leave it without tillage, cultivation or seeds, it will not give you anything. The *sunna* of Allah in this instance is that someone who puts effort into in cultivating his land will reap the reward of a good harvest and someone who does not do so will get nothing from it. If that was not the case and planting, tillage, watering and doing everything well did not produce fruit, whereas failing to do any of these things did produce a good result, we would not find anyone tending his land and caring for it.

Thus, for existence to be correctly ordered, there must be promise and threat on the part of one who truly has the power to carry them out, who is not affected by weakness, and who does not change or alter. This is necessary to bring about the universal natural flow of cause and effect we see happening in front of us every day. The one who works hard in his studies passes and the one who does not do so fails. As long as this remains the case, life will be properly in balance. If it does not, and random chance begins to prevail, so that people who do not study pass and those who do fail, life will become chaotic and proper values will be lost.

The balance of promise and threat therefore is the fulcrum around which the wheel of life revolves. If this balance were to be upset and, for instance, the one who did not work was rewarded and the one who did was punished, existence would be vitiated. Why? Because everyone works for their own self-interest and, in that respect, there is no difference between believers, sinners and unbelievers. Sinners and unbelievers, however, are short-sighted and foolish, and so they opt for a tiny, extremely short-lived benefit in exchange for a punishment which will be enormous and never-ending. Believers, on the other hand, are distinguished by intelligence and far-sightedness and so they deny themselves immediate, short-lived pleasure and opt for far greater, everlasting pleasure by obeying Allah Almighty.

To illustrate that, let us imagine two brothers. One of them wakes up early, prays, has breakfast, picks up his books and goes to school. He listens attentively to his teachers and returns home to go over what he has learnt. The other sleeps in, gets up mid-morning and goes out to hang about in the streets, indulging in

any kind of pleasurable activity that presents itself to him, without bothering about examining its ruling in the Shari'a of Allah to see whether it is unlawful or lawful. Both brothers have their own self-interest at heart, but the former has more real regard for himself and chooses bearable difficulty in his years of study in order to give himself security, high social standing and wealth for the rest of his life. The latter also has regard for himself, but in a very short-sighted way, choosing immediate self-gratification, with the result that he wastes his life, ruins his future and is worthless among his peers.

Everyone, then, desires good for themselves – but the criteria of that desire differ. Some of us have sound criteria and undergo a little hardship to achieve everlasting bliss, whereas the criteria of others is faulty and they opt for short-term pleasure rather than permanent bliss. This is a universal truth. You will not find anyone at ease at the end of his life who did not exert himself in his earlier years to achieve that ease. You will not find a failure, in need of social welfare in old age, who did not indulge himself to the full in his earlier years and thus condemn himself to misery in later life. That is the basis of the old adage: no one ever has two bites at the cherry. He who tires himself at the beginning will have rest at the end; he who rests at the beginning will be tired at the end.

So the promise of future reward in return for present exertion, and the warning against the dangers inherent in immediate self-gratification, are necessary to keep people on the path to success. The promise is needed for the fruit to be able to ripen fully on the branch, and the threat to prevent it being picked early and wasted, so that people are encouraged to reach their full potential and are deterred from taking a self-destructive path. And when the one who promises is Allah Almighty, His promise will certainly be carried out, because He is the One who does not die, the One who is always Powerful whose power does not weaken, the One who does what He wills.

Allah Almighty promises Gardens to male believers and female believers using the plural in all these words. This means grammatically that Allah promises a Garden to every believing man and a Garden to every believing woman. It is like when a teacher says to his students, "Get out your books." The verb and noun are both in

the plural but the meaning is that each individual student should get out his individual book. The same applies when a teacher says, "Take up your pens." Every student is expected to pick up their own pen. So the words of the Almighty: "*Allah has promised the men and women believers Gardens*" mean that each one of them will have a Garden.

If someone asks why Allah Almighty says in *Surat ar-Rahman*: "*For those who fear the Station of their Lord there are two Gardens*" (55:46) we say that it is necessary to pay attention to the context within which those words find their place. *Surat ar-Rahman* does not speak only about human beings; it speaks about human beings and also about the jinn. The Almighty says in it: "*He created man from dry earth like baked clay; and He created the jinn from a fusion of fire.*" (55:14-15) And He also says: "*Soon shall We deal with you, you two weighty throngs.*" (55:31) So the human beings will have a Garden of Paradise and the jinn will also have a Garden. That is why Allah Almighty says: "*For those who fear the Station of their Lord there are two Gardens.*" (55:46) The human being who fears the station of his Lord will have a Garden of Paradise and likewise the jinn who fears the station of his Lord will have a Garden.

It is also possible that it means that there will in fact be two Gardens for each person. This is because Allah Almighty did not create Gardens for the godfearing alone or create Hell for the unbelievers alone. Rather He created a Garden for every one of His creatures, which will remain part of His creation until the Hour comes. Al-Bukhari reported that Abu Hurayra said that the Prophet ﷺ said, "Anyone who enters Paradise will see the place he would have had in Hell if he had done evil so that it will increase him in thankfulness. Anyone who enters Hell will see the place he would have had in Paradise if he had done good so that it will be a source of regret to him."

When the people of Paradise enter Paradise, those other Gardens will remain with no one entering them because their potential inhabitants are in fact among the people of Hell and so Allah lets the believers, the people of Paradise, inherit them. This is a possible meaning of the words of the Almighty: "*That is the Garden you will inherit for what you did*" (43:72), meaning "it was not in fact created for you but you have inherited it because its

owners became people of Hell." Corroborating this, Ibn Majah relates from Abu Hurayra ﷺ that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "Every one of you has two dwellings: a dwelling in Paradise and a dwelling in Hell. When someone dies and enters Hell, the people of Paradise inherit his dwelling. That is the meaning of the words of the Almighty: '*Such people are the inheritors.*' (23:10)."

The one who has promised us these Gardens is Allah Almighty and He has the power to fulfil His promise to us of Gardens in which there is what no eye has seen nor any ear heard and has not occurred to the heart of any man. In al-Bukhari, Muslim and at-Tirmidhi, Abu Hurayra ﷺ related that the Prophet ﷺ said, "Allah Almighty has prepared for His righteous slaves what no eye has seen, no ear has heard and has not occurred to the heart of man." He has made these Gardens wide and ample. They contain foodstuffs, flowers and forms whose beauty delights the eye, which are wonderfully soft to the touch, and which fill the noses with the fragrance of their sweetest of scents.

One of the characteristics of their beauty is that rivers flow under them and not over them. So their springs are integral to them, meaning that these rivers spring up from within them. It is as if every river springs up from under each individual garden. To gauge something of the beauty of these rivers, it is only necessary to know that Allah Almighty has brought them directly into being. In this world every river has two banks. The rivers of Paradise flow without any banks. They are held in place by the One Who prevents the sky from falling onto the earth. Among the rivers are rivers of milk, rivers of honey, rivers of water and rivers of wine. All of them flow in the same manner but they do not mix with one another. Each of them is separate, because Allah Almighty who is the Creator has willed that for them. Blessed be Allah, the best of Creators!

The Way to Paradise

Allah Almighty says:

"*But as for those who believe and do right actions, their Lord will guide them by their faith. Rivers will flow under them in Gardens of Delight.*" (10:9)

The guidance referred to here is that of being directed to good through following the Way that Allah Almighty has sent to us. Allah Almighty sets out the right path for both believers and unbelievers but those who believe in Allah will be given another kind of guidance by Him, making obedience to Him easy for them. That is why the Almighty says: "*Seek help in steadfastness and the prayer. But that is a very hard thing except for the humble.*" (2:45) The believer is happy to meet the hardships entailed by obedience and so Allah Almighty makes acts of obedience easy for him and makes him experience sweetness in performing them, so that by Divine support the difficulty turns into ease.

Talking about His Way, Allah Almighty says: "*This is My Way and it is straight, so follow it. Do not follow other ways or you will be cut off a from His Way.*" (6:153) And He says: "*The Way should lead to Allah, but there are those who deviate from it.*" (16:9) It means: "Some deviate from the Way, and that is the way of error." He also says: "*This is a Straight Path to Me.*" (15:41) Ibn Mas'ud ﷺ reported, "The Messenger of Allah ﷺ drew a line for us and said, 'This is the Way of Allah.' Then he drew lines to the right and left of it and then said, 'These are [other] paths and on each of them is a shaytan calling people to it.' Then he recited, '*This is My Way and it is straight, so follow it. Do not follow other ways.*' (6:153) (Ahmad ibn Hanbal) If someone says that Allah Almighty says elsewhere: '*A Light has come to you from Allah and a Clear Book. By it, Allah guides those who follow what pleases Him to the paths of Peace.*' (5:15-16) The answer to this is that these paths are simply aspects of that one Path. They are branches of faith, which the Path

brings together, just as the trunk of a tree is the joining-point of its various boughs and branches.

The Way to Paradise is the active response of those who accept the invitation of Him Who invites them to it. Al-Bukhari relates in his *Sahih* that Jabir ibn Abdullah ﷺ said, "Some angels came to the Prophet ﷺ while he was asleep. One of them said, 'He is asleep.' Another said, 'The eye is asleep while the heart is awake.' They said, 'There is a simile for this companion of yours, so tell him what it is.' One of them said, 'He is asleep.' Another said, 'The eye sleeps but the heart is awake.' They said, 'The simile is that of a man who builds a house and holds a feast in it. He sends out someone to invite people. Those who respond to the one who invites them enter the house and eat from the feast. Those who do not respond to the one who invites them do not enter the house and do not eat from the feast.' They said, 'Interpret it for him so that he can understand it.' One of them said, 'He is asleep.' Another of them said, 'The eye is asleep but the heart is awake.' They said, 'The house is Paradise and the one who invites people is Muhammad ﷺ. Anyone who obeys Muhammad has obeyed Allah. Anyone who disobeys Muhammad has disobeyed Allah. Muhammad is the point of differentiation between the people.'"

Allah Almighty says: "*But as for those who believe and do right actions, their Lord will guide them by their faith.*" (10:9) Provided that they believe, the rulings which the Almighty reveals for them help them in their lives and benefit them in the Next World. Their faith is what makes them accept the Way from Allah Almighty and perform righteous deeds and so Allah Almighty guides them to the Way to Paradise. That is why the Almighty says, "*On the Day you see the men and women of the believers with their light streaming out in front of them and to their right*" (57:12) and in another place, "*On the Day when Allah will not disgrace the Prophet and those who believed along with Him. Their light will stream out ahead of them and to their right. They will say, 'Our Lord, perfect our light for us and forgive us! You have power over all things'*" (66:8). This means that the light of the believers, on account of their having accepted and followed the guidance Allah gave them in this world, will be shining out in front of them in the Next. The hypocrites, on the other hand, will

say to those who believe: "'*Wait for us, so that we can borrow some of your light.' They will be told, 'Go back and look for light*'" (57:13), meaning that there is no point in their expecting to find the light they seek in the Next World; it is too late. That light can only be gained in this world, by following the Way of Divine Guidance in this world and doing the right actions which that entails.

Allah invites people to the Abode of Peace and guides to it whomever He wishes

Allah Almighty says, "*Allah calls to the Abode of Peace and He guides whomever He wills to a straight path.*" (10:25) The Abode of Peace is the Next World. It differs from the abode of this world which is filled with trials. This world makes itself attractive and looks beautiful but leads to perdition. That is why Allah Almighty calls to another abode, which is the Abode of Peace. Although people of this world may have a good portion of rank or wealth or health, they are always in fear of losing those things. In the Next World, however, the state of bliss is unchanging and everlasting. That is why Allah Almighty says, "*Allah calls to the Abode of Peace.*"

In the Next World, no one will be harassed by anyone else; no one will have their rights usurped by another as happens in this world. In this world Allah Almighty has ordained that we must live according to the law of cause and effect, but the Next World is not like that. There we will live by the direct command of Allah Almighty and anything we desire will simply appear in front of us the moment we think of it. In this world people's means and powers vary, whereas in the Next World they will live by the gift of Allah Almighty without effort or means. This is because the Abode of Peace is the Abode of Allah Almighty, and Allah Almighty is Peace Itself. In this world, for example, if someone invites you to his house, he does everything possible, according to the means at his disposal, to look after you as well as he can. So what do you think will happen when Your Creator, whose means are absolutely unlimited, invites you to His Abode when you have followed His Way?

This peace cannot derive from human beings because some human beings harbour non-peaceful intentions for you, or only give you peace when they desire peace from you. But when peace comes from Allah Almighty, it is peace from a Lord against Whom no one has power, Who is in need of nothing and Who is not

affected by anyone else. That is why the Almighty says, "*The angels will enter in to welcome them from every gate: 'Peace be upon you.'*" (13:23-24) When the angels say that, they take their peace from the Peace of Allah Almighty. When the people on the Ramparts who have not entered Paradise see the people of Paradise and the people of Hell, they greet the people of Paradise. That is how the people of Paradise are greeted, with a comprehensive, all-enveloping contented peace, because the Caller is Allah Almighty and none can compel Him to end His Peace.

The call of Allah is His Way which He sent with the Messengers in order to organise the activities of life in such a way that people will live together on the Path of Allah Almighty and make this world something like Paradise of the Hereafter. When you see a society in which there is misery in any form, know that an aspect of the Way of Allah has been neglected. If its people had truly travelled on the Way of Allah Almighty, there would not have been any defect in society. Defects in society are caused by some people neglecting the Way of Allah. When you see poor people without anything to eat, then know that someone is going against the Way of Allah – either among the poor themselves, through laziness or excessive begging, or among the rich, through stinginess which prevents them giving the poor their due. That is how the Way of Allah becomes obstructed. Allah Almighty tells us:

> "*But if anyone turns away from My reminder, his life will be a dark and narrow one and on the Day of Rising We will muster him blind. He will ask, 'My Lord, why have you gathered me blind when before I was able to see?' He will say, 'Just as Our Signs came to you and you forgot them, in the same way you too are forgotten today.'*" (20:124-126)

And Allah speaks the truth.

The names of the Gardens and their meanings

Allah Almighty says: "*Give good news to those who believe and do right actions that they will have Gardens with rivers flowing under them.*" (2:25) The Gardens themselves are referred to in various ways. There are the Gardens of Paradise, the Gardens of Eden, the Gardens of Bliss, the Abode of Eternity, the Abode of Peace, the Garden of Refuge, and 'Illiyyun which is the highest and best of all the Gardens. The highest delight in it is the enjoyment of the vision of Allah Almighty, which is a bliss greater than any other bliss.

In explanation of this variety of names Ibn al-Qayyim says that each of them refers to a different aspect of the heavenly Abode. The first name is *Janna* - Paradise - which is the general name transmitted for that dimension of existence and the various types of bliss, pleasure, radiance, joy and good cheer it contains. The second name is *Dar as-Salam* - the Abode of Peace - describing the quality of peace which is found in that dimension. Allah called it this in His words, "*They will have the Abode of Peace with their Lord*" (6:127) and in His words, "*Allah calls to the Abode of Peace.*" (10:25) The third name is *Dar al-Khuld* - the Abode of Eternity. It is so called because its people never leave it, as the Almighty says: "*An uninterrupted gift*" (11:108), and "*This is Our provision which will never run out*" (38:54), and "*Its foodstuffs and cool shade never fail*" (13:35), and "*They will never be made to leave it.*" (15:48) The fourth name is *Dar al-Muqama* - the Abode of Permanence. Allah tells us, relating what its people say: "*They say, 'Praise be to Allah Who has removed all sadness from us. Truly our Lord is Ever-Forgiving, Ever-Thankful – He who has lodged us, in His munificence, in the Abode of Permanence where no weariness or fatigue affects us.'*" (35:34-35)

The fifth name is *Dar al-Ma'wa* – the Abode of Refuge. The Almighty says: "*Beside which is the Garden of Refuge.*" (53:15) Refuge (*ma'wa*) is the form *maf'al* of the root *awa*, and means

being attached to a place and going to it and residing in it. The Almighty also says of it: "*As for him who feared standing before his Lord and forbade the lower self its appetites, Paradise shall be his Refuge.*" (79:41) The sixth name is *Jannat al-'Adn* – the Garden of Eden. The correct position is that this is the name of a group of Gardens, all of which are Gardens of Eden. The Almighty says, "*Gardens of Eden which the All-Merciful has promised His slaves in the Unseen*" (19:61), and "*They will enter Gardens of Eden where they will be adorned with gold bracelets and pearls, and where their clothing will be of silk*" (35:33), and also "*Fine dwellings in the Gardens of Eden.*" (9:72) The seventh name is *Dar al-Haya* – the Abode of Life. The Almighty says: "*The abode of the Next World: that is truly life.*" (29:64) The eighth name is *Firdaws* – Paradise. The Almighty says, "*Such people are the inheritors who will inherit Paradise, remaining in it timelessly, forever.*" (23:10-11), and also "*Those who believe and do right actions will have the gardens of Paradise as hospitality, remaining in them timelessly, forever.*" (18:107-108)

The ninth name is *Jannat an-Na'im* – the Gardens of Delight. The Almighty says, "*For those who believe and do right actions there are Gardens of Delight.*" (31:8) The tenth name is *Maqam Amin* – a Safe Place. The Almighty says, "*The godfearing will be in a Safe Place.*" (44:51) The eleventh name is *Maq'ad Sidq* – Seat of Honour. The Almighty says: "*The godfearing shall be amid Gardens and rivers, on Seats of Honour in the presence of an All-Powerful King.*" (54:54-55) The twelfth name is *Qadam Sidq* – Sure Footing. The Almighty says, "*Give good news to those who believe that they are on a Sure Footing with their Lord.*" (10:2)

Some of the Gardens created by Allah were planted with His own Hand

'Abdullah ibn 'Umar ﷺ said: "Allah created four things with His Hand: the Throne, the Pen, Eden and Adam ﷺ. Then He said to the rest of creation, 'Be!' and it was." (al-Hakam and al-Bayhaqi) According to Ibn Kathir, "This is related from Ka'b al-Ahbar, Abu al-'Aliya and others: 'When Allah created the Garden of Eden and planted it with His own Hand, He looked at it and said to it, "Speak." It said, "*The believers have succeeded.*"'" Abu Sa'id said: "Allah created Paradise with alternate bricks of gold and silver and planted it. He said to it, 'Speak,' and it said, '*The believers have succeeded.*' The angels entered it and said, 'Good tidings for you: the station of kings.'"

Ibn al-Qayyim said: "The Almighty Lord made an Abode in the Gardens which He chose for Himself. He singled it out for nearness to His Throne and planted it with His own Hand. It is the Queen of all the Gardens. Allah Almighty chooses from every category the highest and best of them. He chose Jibril from among the angels and Muhammad ﷺ from among mankind, the Highest from among the heavens, Makka from among cities, Muharram from among the months, the Night of Power from among nights, Friday from among days, the middle time from among the times of the night, the times of the prayers from among the times of each day, and so forth. The Almighty '*creates and chooses whatever He wills.*'" (28:68)

The earth, mud, pebbles and buildings of Paradise

Abu Hurayra ﷺ reported: "We said, 'Messenger of Allah, when we are with you, our hearts are tender and we are people of the Next World. But when we leave you, we admire this world and enjoy our women and children.' He said 'If you were to remain in the state you are in when you are in my presence then you would shake hands with the angels and they would visit you in your houses. If you did not commit wrong actions then Allah would produce a people who commit wrong actions so that He could forgive them.' We said, 'Messenger of Allah, tell us what the buildings of the Garden are like.' He said, 'Alternate bricks of gold and silver. Its mortar is fragrant musk and its pebbles are pearls and rubies. Its earth is saffron. Whoever enters it will enjoy a delight in which there is no sorrow. He will be immortal and never die. His clothes will not wear out and his youth will never fade. Three will not have their supplication rejected: a just imam, a fasting person until he breaks his fast, and those who have suffered injustice, whose supplication will be carried on clouds and the gates of heavens will be opened to it. The Lord will say, "By My might and majesty, I will help you, even if it be after some time."'" (Ahmad)

The Gates of Paradise

Sahl ibn Sa'd ﷺ related that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "There are eight Gates in Paradise, one of which is a gate called *ar-Rayyan*, which only those who fast go through." (al-Bukhari) Abu Hurayra ﷺ reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Those who perform different kinds of action in the way of Allah will be summoned from particular gates of Paradise and told, 'O slave of Allah, this is better.' All the people who did the prayer will be called from the Gate of the Prayer. All the people who did *jihad* will be called from the Gate of *Jihad*. All the people who fasted will be called from the Gate of *Rayyan*. All the people who gave *sadaqa* will be called from the Gate of *Sadaqa*." Abu Bakr said, "May my father and mother be sacrificed for you, Messenger of Allah. No one called from those gates will feel any distress. Will anyone be called from all those gates?" "Yes," he replied, "and I hope that you will be among them." (al-Bukhari)

It is reported that the Prophet ﷺ said, "There is no Muslim who does *wudu'* and does it well and then rises and prays two *rak'ats*, directing his heart and his face to properly performing them, without Paradise being obligatory for him." 'Uqba ibn 'Amir replied, "I said, 'How excellent this is!' Then someone in front of me said, 'What was before it was better still.' I looked, and it was 'Umar. He said, 'I see that you have just arrived. He said, "There is none of you who does *wudu'* and does *wudu'* well and then says, 'I testify that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the slave of Allah and His Messenger,' but that the eight gates of Paradise will be opened for him and he may enter whichever of them he wishes."'" (Muslim) At-Tirmidhi added after the *shahada*: "O Allah, make me one of the penitent and make me among the purified." (at-Tirmidhi) 'Utba ibn 'Abd as-Sulami ﷺ reported that he heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say, "Any Muslim three of whose children die before reaching puberty, will be met by them at the eight gates of Paradise and he may enter whichever of them he wishes." (Ahmad and an-Nasa'i)

Abu Hurayra ﷺ reported: "The Messenger of Allah ﷺ was given some meat and he picked up the shoulder, which he liked, ate some of it, and then said, 'I will be the master of people on the Day of Rising. Do you know what that will entail? Allah will gather the first and the last on the Day of Rising on the same plain so that an observer will be able to see them and a speaker make them hear. The sun will be brought near to them and people will experience such grief and distress that they will not be able to bear or endure it. People will say to one another, "Do you not see what a state you are in and what has come to you? Why do you not look for someone to intercede with your Lord on your behalf?" People will say to one another, "Go to Adam." They will go to Adam ﷺ and say, "Adam, you are the father of mankind. Allah created you with His hand and breathed into you of His spirit. He commanded angels to prostrate to you. Intercede with your Lord on our behalf! Do you not see what we are suffering and what has happened to us?" Adam will say, "My Lord is angry today with such anger as has never existed before nor will again. He forbade me the Tree and I disobeyed. O myself, myself, myself! Go to someone else. Go to Nuh."

'They will go to Nuh ﷺ and say, "O Nuh, you were the first of the Messengers to be sent to the people of the earth and Allah called you a thankful slave. Intercede with your Lord on our behalf! Do you not see what we are suffering and what has happened to us?" He will say to them, "My Almighty Lord is angry today with such anger as has never existed before nor will again. I made a supplication on behalf of my family. O myself, myself, myself! Go to someone else! Go to Ibrahim."

'They will go to Ibrahim ﷺ and say, "You are the Prophet of Allah and His close friend among the people of the earth. Intercede with your Lord on our behalf. Do you not see what we are suffering?" Ibrahim will say, "My Lord is angry today with such anger as has never existed before nor will again." He will mention his lies and say, "Myself, myself!' Go to someone else! Go to Musa."

'They will go to Musa ﷺ and say, "Musa, you are the Messenger of Allah and Allah singled you out with a Prophetic

Mission for Him and by your speaking with Him. Intercede with your Lord on our behalf! Do you not see what we are suffering and what has happened to us?" Musa will say to them, "My Lord is angry today with such anger as has never existed before nor will again. I killed a soul which I was not authorised to kill. Go to someone else. Myself, myself! Go to 'Isa."

'They will go to 'Isa ﷺ and say, "'Isa, you are the Messenger of Allah, and you spoke to people while still in the cradle, and you are a Word which He cast to Maryam and a Spirit from Him. Intercede with your Lord on our behalf! Do you not see what we are suffering and what has happened to us?" 'Isa will say to them, "My Lord is angry today with such anger as has never existed before or will again. [He will not mention any wrong action.] My soul! My soul! Go to someone else. Go to Muhammad ﷺ."

'They will go to him and say, "Muhammad. You are the Messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets. Allah has forgiven you your past and future wrong actions. Intercede with your Lord on our behalf! Do you not see what we are suffering and what has happened to us?" I will go and arrive under the Throne and fall down in prostration to my Lord. Then Allah will inspire me with some words to praise and laud Him, with which He will have inspired no one before me. Then it will be said, "O Muhammad, raise your head. Ask and your request will be granted. Intercede and your intercession will be accepted." I will raise my head and say, "O my Lord, my community! My community!" It will be said, "O Muhammad, bring in by the right-hand gate of the gates of Paradise those of your community who will not be subjected to any reckoning and the rest of your community can share the other gates with other people." By the One who has the soul of Muhammad in His hand, the distance between the two gateposts of the gates of Paradise is as far as between Makka and Hajar, or between Makka and Busra.'" (al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Khalid ibn 'Umayr al-'Adawi ﷺ said, "'Utba ibn Ghazwan addressed us and praised Allah and then said, 'This world has been told of its final end and it is ready to be cut off. All that remains of it is like the small amount of water that a person with a vessel inevitably leaves in it. You will move from it to an abode which will never pass away, so move with the best of what you have. We

have been told that a stone which is thrown from the edge of Hell will fall into it for seventy years without ever reaching the bottom. By Allah, it will be filled. Do you find that strange, when we have been told that the distance between the two gateposts of the gates of Paradise is forty years? A day will arrive when it is filled to the brim." (Muslim)

Anas ibn Malik ﷺ reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "I am the first of those who will take hold of the handle of the gate of Paradise. It is no boast." (Abu Nu'aym) 'Asim ibn Laqit ibn 'Amir ﷺ went to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He said, "I asked, 'Messenger of Allah, what are Paradise and Hell like?' He said, 'Hell has seven gates, and between each gate is a distance like that which a rider would cover in seventy years. Paradise has eight gates, and between each gate is a distance like that which a rider would cover in seventy years.'" (Ahmad)

The first to knock on the gate of Paradise

Anas ﷺ reported from the Prophet ﷺ: "The Treasurer will say, 'I was ordered not to open to anyone before you.'" (Muslim) That was to show the prerogative and rank of the Prophet ﷺ. Abu Hurayra ﷺ reported that the Prophet ﷺ said, "I shall be the first to open the Gate of Paradise, except for a woman who gets there before me. I will ask her, 'How is this? Who are you?' She will say, 'I am a woman who remained single for the sake of my orphaned children.'" (al-Haythami) Anas ﷺ related that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "I will be the Messenger with the most followers on the Day of Rising. I will be first to knock at the door of Paradise." (Muslim)

The doorkeepers of Paradise and its custodians and the name of the most prominent of them, their leader

Allah Almighty says: "*And those who have* taqwa *of their Lord will be driven to Paradise in companies and when they arrive there, finding its gates open, its custodians will say to them, 'Peace be upon you....'*" (39:73) Anas ﷺ related that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "I will go to the Gate of Paradise on the Day of Resurrection and ask for it to be opened. The custodian will say, 'Who are you?' I will answer, 'Muhammad.' He will say, 'I was commanded [to wait for] you and will not open to anyone before you.'" (Muslim) Allah Almighty has named the greatest of these custodians Ridwan, which is a name derived from *rida* (contentment). He named the guardian of the Fire Malik, a name derived from *mulk* which, in a certain form means strength and power.

The rivers and springs of Paradise

Allah Almighty says:

> "*An image of Paradise which is promised to those who are godfearing: in it there are rivers of water which will never spoil and rivers of milk whose taste will never change and rivers of wine, delightful to all who drink it, and rivers of honey of undiluted purity; in it they will have fruit of every kind and forgiveness from their Lord.*" (47:15)

Allah Almighty is here reassuring us, since the rivers of Paradise differ from the rivers of this world. He dissevers from them all those qualities which may spoil the rivers of this world. The waters of rivers here may run dry or become changed and brackish. So Allah says, "*rivers of water which will never spoil.*" The Almighty gives us the name of something we are familiar with: a river. All of us know what a river is. But the Almighty tells us that in the Next World He will remove from it all the defects we see in the earthly water of this world. The defect of water is that after sitting for a long period of time it becomes stale and stagnant. That does not happen to the water of Paradise.

There are also rivers of milk in Paradise, whose taste does not change. The defect of milk is that its taste changes to sourness and it becomes unpleasant. The Arabs used to get milk from their camels and store it in waterskins. After that the camels would travel great distances to graze and to their destinations. So when a desert Arab needed milk, all he had was the milk stored in waterskins and he would find its taste changed, but did not have anything else. That is why Allah Almighty made it clear that in Paradise are "*rivers of milk whose taste will never change.*"

Then He speaks of "*rivers of wine.*" Wine is a known substance, but we understand that the wine referred to here is not like the wine of this world. The wine of this world has many destructive qualities. The detrimental aspects of the wine of this world are without number. It muddles the intellect and causes people to

babble. It gives one a headache and has an unpleasant taste. It is a satanic impurity which causes enmity and hatred between people and prevents remembrance of Allah and the prayer. It encourages fornication and may even lead to people assaulting their own children. It removes proper jealousy and brings about humiliation, regret and disgrace. Its drinkers come to resemble the most imperfect type of human being: the insane. It removes the best names and qualities and clothes one in the ugliest of names and attributes. It makes it easy to kill people and to disclose secrets whose disclosure is harmful or destructive. It causes people to waste the property in their charge. It rends veils, reveals secrets and discloses faults. It induces people to commit evil actions and removes from their hearts respect for sacred things. And, worse than that, as a *hadith* in Ibn Majah tells us, "The inveterate drinker is like an idol-worshipper." And the truth is that the harm caused by wine is in fact many times greater than we have mentioned here.

How many wars it has provoked! How many a rich man it has impoverished! How many a mighty person it has abased! How many a noble one has it brought low! By it blessings are removed, love is nullified and enmity is kindled. How often it has parted a man from his wife and taken over his heart and mind! How many regrets it has brought! How many doors of good are locked in the face of the drinker, and how many doors of evil are opened for him! How many have fallen into affliction and hastened their deaths because of it! If its sole defect had been that the wine of this world precludes the one who drinks it from drinking the wine of Paradise that would be enough, for as the Prophet ﷺ said, "Whoever drinks wine in this world will not drink it in the Next World" (Ibn Majah) The wine of the Next World, on the other hand, does not unsettle the mind or harm the body in any way. It is *"delightful to drinkers"* and has no harmful side-effects or after-effects whatsoever.

He also mentions "*rivers of honey of undiluted purity.*" The defect of honey is that it sometimes becomes mixed with other things. The Arabs used to get honey from the mountains where the bees lived in cracks and crevices. When they took out the honey, they found sand and pebbles in it. It is as if the Almighty

were saying, "As for the honey which had impurities in it here in this world, I will purify it for you there in Paradise." Imagine these four substances – water, milk, wine and honey – which are the best drinks people know, being brought together in one place: one for drinking and purification, one for strength and nourishment, one for pleasure and joy, and one for healing and benefit. Allah knows best.

If someone were to ask why Allah uses such imagery when the delights of Paradise are "what no eye had seen nor ear has heard nor has occurred to the heart of man" and that human language is therefore unable to convey what they are, we would answer that Allah says these things to give us an approximation of what they are like. He gives us an image which is connected to things we know in order to make them accessible to our minds. Another example of this is when the Almighty wanted to give us an idea of how He illuminates existence when in reality there is nothing comparable to the essential light of Allah.

The Almighty says:

> *"Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The likeness of His Light is that of a niche in which is a lamp, the lamp inside a glass, the glass like a brilliant star, lit from a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the east nor of the west, its oil all but giving off light even if no fire touches it. Light upon Light! Allah guides to His Light whomever He wills, and Allah makes likenesses for mankind. and Allah has knowledge of all things."* (24:35)

The Almighty uses such symbols to give us an approximate image of what He is talking about, even though human language is actually incapable of conveying the true meaning of the reality He is describing, because human language is confined to this world in which we live and does not extend to the Next World and what it contains. In a similar vein the Almighty says: "*He has prepared for them Gardens with rivers flowing under them.*" (9:100) Gardens contain trees which intertwine and tower upwards; and we know that where there are trees there must also be water. That is why He says, "*with rivers flowing beneath them.*" However, whereas the

rivers of this world flow between two banks, the rivers of Paradise are held in place by the power of Allah alone.

The rivers of Paradise have their source in the highest Paradise and then flow down to the lowest of its levels as al-Bukhari related in his *Sahih* in a hadith transmitted by Abu Hurayra ﷺ in which the Prophet ﷺ said, "This Garden has a hundred levels which Allah has prepared for those who strive in His Way. Between each level is a distance similar to that between heaven and earth. When you ask Allah, ask Him for Firdaws. It is in the midst of Paradise and is the highest point of Paradise. Above it is the Throne of the All-Merciful. From it the rivers of the Garden spring forth." (al-Bukhari) At-Tirmidhi related something similar to this in hadiths from Mu'adh ibn Jabal and 'Ubada ibn as-Samit ﷺ. The wording in the hadith of 'Ubada is: "Paradise has a hundred levels. Between each level is the distance of a hundred years. Firdaws is the highest level and from it come four rivers and the Throne is above it. If you ask Allah, ask Him for the Highest Paradise."(at-Tirmidhi)

We find in the *Sahih* of al-Bukhari from the hadith of Anas ibn Malik ﷺ that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "I was taken to the Lote-Tree of the Furthest Limit in the seventh heaven. Its fruit are like the jars of Hajar and its leaves are like the ears of elephants. From the base of its trunk emerge two rivers on the surface and two underground. I asked, 'Jibril, what is this?' He answered, 'The two underground rivers are in Paradise and the two surface ones are the Nile and the Euphrates.'" (al-Bukhari)

Also in the *Sahih* from the hadith of Anas ﷺ is that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "While I was travelling in the Garden there was a river on the banks of which were tents made of hollow pearls. I asked, 'What is this, Jibril?' He answered, 'This is Kawthar which your Lord has given you.' The angel struck its earth with his hand and its earth was fragrant musk." (al-Bukhari) In *Sahih Muslim* Anas ibn Malik ﷺ relates that the Prophet ﷺ said, "Kawthar is a river in Paradise which my Almighty Lord has promised me." 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar ﷺ reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Kawthar is a river in Paradise whose banks are made of gold and it flows over pearls and rubies. Its earth is more fragrant than musk and its water is sweeter than honey and whiter than snow." (at-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah)

We find in the *Jami'* of at-Tirmidhi the hadith of Hakim ibn Mu'awiya from his father ﷺ, that the Prophet ﷺ said, "In Paradise there are a sea of water, a sea of honey, a sea of milk and a sea of wine. Then rivers divide." Abu Hurayra ﷺ reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Whoever desires Allah Almighty to let him drink of the wine of the Next World should forgo it in this world. Whoever desires Allah to clothe him in silk in the Next World should forgo it in this world. The rivers of Paradise gush out from beneath hills or mountains of musk. If the jewellery of the least of the people of Paradise were to be compared to all the jewellery of the people of this world, what Allah will adorn that person with in the Next World is better than all of it put together." (al-Hakim)

The fragrance and taste of the springs of Paradise

Regarding the springs of Paradise, the Almighty says: "*The godfearing will be amid Gardens and Springs.*" (15:45) And He says: "*The truly good will drink from a cup mixed with the coolness of camphor, a spring from which Allah's slaves will drink, making it gush forth at will abundantly*" (76:5-6), and also "*They will be given there a cup to drink mixed with the warmth of ginger. In it there is a flowing spring called Salsabil.*" (76:17-18)

The Almighty speaks about a spring from which those brought near to Him will drink, stating that the drink of the people who do good is mixed with it. This is because although their actions were purely for Allah alone, making their drink absolutely pure, their good actions were nevertheless, of varying quality and so their drink will also be varied. A similar indication is found in the words of the Almighty: "*The truly good will be in Perfect Bliss on couches, gazing in wonder. You will recognise in their faces the radiance of delight. They are given the choicest sealed wine to drink, whose seal is musk - let those with aspiration aspire to that! – mixed with Tasnim, a fountain at which those brought near shall drink.*" (83:17-28)

Concerning that, the Almighty informs us that their drink will be mixed with two things: camphor in the first *ayat*, and ginger in the second. Camphor brings coolness and a beautiful perfume.

Ginger brings heat and a beautiful perfume. What happens to the drinkers, when they combine the two drinks by having one after the other, is that they achieve a state which is more perfect and more pleasant than they would enjoy by having just one of them on its own. The two substances are equal in quality – but how fine it is that the camphor precedes the ginger! There are two delicious cups to drink, and the coolness of the camphor in the first is balanced and equalised by the heat of the ginger in the second which succeeds it.

The coolness of the camphor is their reward for the heat they experienced on account of the fear they faced in this world, and for their steadfastness in fulfilling all the obligations imposed on them. That is why Allah also said: *"He will reward them for their steadfastness with a Garden and with silk."* (76:12). There is some hardship and restriction involved in restraining the soul from its appetites, and so the reward for doing that includes the softness of silk and the unconfined expanses of Paradise to balance out that hardship and restriction. Allah combines outward beauty and inward delight for them as their recompense for beautifying their outward aspect in this world with the laws of Islam and their inward with the realities of faith. Allah goes on to say: *"They shall wear green garments of fine silk and rich brocade. They shall be adorned with silver bracelets."* (76:21) That is their outward adornment; their inward adornment is to be purified from every harm and imperfection.

The trees of Paradise and their shade

The Almighty said: *"We shall admit them into cool and shady shade."* (4:57) In the Arabic language, when you want to stress a meaning you can do so by repeating the word you want to emphasise. An Arab, for example, will say, "This is a dark night (*layla laylā*)!" To stress the depth of the shade (*zill*) here it is repeated in the form *zalila*. The words "shady shade" are particularly pertinent to people who live in desert lands. Shade is welcome wherever it can be found. There is a kind of air-conditioned tent they make these days which has a double layer. The first layer is exposed to the sun and bears the heat; and the second layer insulates against the heat. The same effect is experienced in multi-storey dwellings in hot lands, where the lower floors are cool whereas the top floor, which is exposed directly to the sun's heat, is uncomfortably hot.

The double layers mean that the shadow itself is in the shade. That is why the shade of a tree is preferable to the shade of a wall. The shade of a wall is brought about by a single layer and, while it keeps out the sun, it also stops the flow of air. The shade of a tree, however, is different because each of the leaves of the tree has a leaf above it so every leaf is in the shade of a higher leaf. Every leaf is also light and so allows the breeze to flow through. In this way trees both shelter those who sit under them from the heat of the sun and also allow them to experience a cooling breeze. That is how we understand the words "shady shade": the shade is in itself refreshing. Reflecting this, a poet said:

We were protected from the blast of the hot sand
by a valley watered by abundant rain.
We alighted under a tree, and it bent over us
as nursing mothers bend over their suckling child.
It blocks the sun from whatever direction it shines
and veils us while allowing the breezes through.

Ibn al-Qayyim tells us that Allah Almighty says: "*The Companions of the Right: what of the Companions of the Right? Amid thornless* (makhdud) *lote-trees, and fruit-laden* (mamdud) *acacias, and wide-spreading shade, and outpouring water, and fruits in abundance never failing, unrestricted.*" (56:27-33) He says also: "*shaded by spreading branches*" (55:48), in the plural. He further says: "*In them are fruits and date-palms and pomegranates.*" (55:68) The word *makhdud* signifies something whose thorns have been removed and cut off. That what Ibn 'Abbas, Mujahid, Muqatil and Qatada say, and they have two proofs for their position. The first is linguistic. The verb *khadad* means 'to cut off', and is used for the action of cutting off ripe fruit. When trees have their thorns cut they are called *khadid* and *makhdud*. It is also used for the action of stripping the bark from branches.

The second proof comes from a hadith related by 'Utba ibn 'Abd as-Salam ﷺ, who said: "I was sitting with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ when a Bedouin came up to us and said, 'Messenger of Allah, I heard you mention a tree in Paradise, but I do not know of a tree which has more thorns than it (i.e. the lote-tree).' The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'Allah will put in the place of each of its thorns a furry fruit the size of a goat's testicle. It contains seventy distinct flavours, none of which resemble another.'" (Abu Dawud) Sulaym ibn 'Amir said, "The Companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ used to say, 'Allah has benefited us by the Bedouins and their questions. One day a Bedouin came up and said, "Messenger of Allah. Allah mentions a tree in Paradise which is harmful. I did not think that there would be any tree in Paradise which would harm someone." The Messenger of Allah ﷺ asked, "What is it?" He answered, "The lote-tree. It has harmful thorns." The Prophet ﷺ said, "Does Allah not say 'thornless lote-trees'? Allah has removed its thorns and put a fruit in place of every thorn."'" (Nu'aym ibn Hammad)

As for the meaning of the words of the Almighty, "*fruit-laden* (mamdud) *acacias* (talh)" (56:29), most commentators say that *talh* is the banana tree. According to Mujahid, *talh* refers to the Wadi Wajj and its beauty. That is why the words, "*fruit-laden acacias*" are used in reference to the abundance of its trees. That is the view of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, Ibn 'Abbas, Abu Hurayra and Abu Sa'id al-

Khudri ﷺ. According to another group, *talh* is a large tall tree with many thorns found in the Arabian deserts. It has white flowers, a sweet scent and provides refreshing shade. According to Ibn Qutayba, *talh* means a tree which has many fruits and leaves from top to bottom, hiding its trunk.

Al-Layth said, "The *talh* is the Umm Ghaylan tree (*mimosa gummifera*). It has curved thorns. It is the thorn tree which has the most thorns, hardest branches and best gum." Abu Ishaq said, "It can mean the Umm Ghaylan tree because it has white blossoms with a very sweet scent. They were promised the like of what they know and love, although it will be better than what is in this world, as Allah has made everything in Paradise better than what is in this world. What is in Paradise is inevitably far superior to what is in this world." It is clear that the reason why *talh mandud* is said to be the banana tree is its many bunches of fruit, but it is clear that linguistically *talh* refers to the large tree in the desert. Allah knows best.

Regarding the words "*wide-spreading shade*", the two *Sahih* collections both contain the hadith of Abu Hurayra ﷺ reporting that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "In Paradise is a tree in whose shade a rider can travel for a hundred years and not leave it. Recite, if you wish '*wide-spreading shade*.'" (56:30). Also in the two *Sahih* collections we find a *hadith* of Abu Hazim from Sahl ibn Sa'd ﷺ according to which the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "In Paradise there is a tree in whose shade a rider can travel for a hundred years and not leave it." Abu Hazim said, "An-Nu'man ibn Abi 'Ayyash az-Zurqi related and said that Abu Sa'id al-Khudri ﷺ related that the Prophet ﷺ said, 'There is a tree in Paradise in whose shade a good lean swift mount can travel for a hundred years without leaving it.'" Ibn 'Abbas ﷺ said, "The term '*wide-spreading shade*' refers to a tree in Paradise with a trunk whose size is such that a rider can travel in its shade for a hundred years in every direction. The people of Paradise – the people of the higher parts and others – go out to it to converse in its shade." He said, "Some of them have nostalgic yearnings and remember the pleasure of this world, so Allah sends out a breeze in Paradise which will imbue that tree with every diversion that there was in this world."

Al-Jami' of at-Tirmidhi contains the hadith of Abu Hurayra ﷺ in which the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "There is no tree in Paradise which does not have a golden trunk." He said that this is a *hasan hadith*. Abu Sa'id al-Khudri ﷺ said that a man said, "Messenger of Allah, is there Good (*Tuba*) for the one who sees you and believes in you?" He said, "There is Good for the one who sees me and believes in me, then Good and then Good. And then Good again for the one who believes in me and yet has not seen me." A man said, "Messenger of Allah, what is this Good (*Tuba*)?" He said, "It is a tree in Paradise covering a distance of a hundred years. Clothing for the people of Paradise comes from its calyx." (Ahmad) Ibn 'Abbas ﷺ said, "The trunks of palm-trees of Paradise are made of green emerald, their stumps are of red gold and their calyx provides the clothing of the people of Paradise. From it their short garments and robes are made. Their fruits are like jars and buckets and are whiter than milk, sweeter than honey and softer than butter. There are no stones in them." (al-Marwazi)

'Amr ibn Zayd al-Bikali related that he heard 'Utba ibn 'Abd as-Salami ﷺ say, "A Bedouin came to the Prophet ﷺ and asked him about the Basin. He mentioned Paradise and then the bedouin asked, 'Is there fruit in it?' He answered, 'Yes. It contains a tree called Tuba,' and he mentioned something which I do not know. He asked, 'Which tree in our land does it resemble?' He said, 'It does not resemble any of the trees of your land.' The Prophet ﷺ then said, 'Have you been to Syria?' 'Yes,' he answered. He said, 'It resembles the trees found in Syria called walnut. It grows on one trunk and its branches spread out. 'What is the size of its base?' he asked. He answered, 'If one of your people's four-year-old camels were to try to go round it, its collar-bone would have broken from old age before it had completed the circuit.' He asked, 'Are there grape-vines in it?' 'Yes,' he answered. He said, 'How big are its bunches?' He replied, 'As far across as a crow can fly in a month without stopping or flagging.' He asked, 'How big are its seeds?' He said, 'If your father were to slaughter one of his rams, would it not be very large?' 'Yes,' he answered. He said, 'What if he were to skin it and give it to your mother and tell her to make a bucket from it?' 'Yes, a seed of such a size would be

enough for me and all my family.' He said, 'Indeed it would, and your whole tribe as well!'" (Ahmad)

Asma' bint Abi Bakr ﷺ reported: "I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ mention the Lote-Tree of the Final Limit. He said, 'A traveller can travel in the shade of its branches for a hundred years (or it can shade a hundred riders under its branches). Its earth is gold and it is as if its fruits were jars.'" (at-Tirmidhi) Mujahid said, "The soil of Paradise is made of silver and its soil is musk. The roots of its trees are gold and silver. Their branches are made of pearls, rubies and emeralds. The leaves and fruits are under that. If someone eats standing, it will not harm him. If someone eats sitting, it will not harm him. If someone eats lying down, it will not harm him. *'Its ripe fruit hanging ready to be picked.'*" (76:14)

Jarir ibn 'Abdullah said: "We stopped at Safah and there was a man sleeping under a tree and the sun had almost reached him. I said to the boy, 'Take this skin and shade him.' He went and shaded him. When he awoke, it turned out to be Salman. I went to him to greet him. He said, 'Jarir, be humble before Allah. If someone is humble before Allah, Allah will exalt him on the Day of Rising. Jarir, do you know what will cause the darkness on the Day of Rising?' 'I do not know,' I answered. He said, 'People's injustice to one another.' Then he took a small stick, which I could scarcely see, between his fingers and said, 'Jarir, if you look for something like this in Paradise, you will not find it.' I said, 'Slave of Allah, what of the palm-trees and other trees?' He answered, 'Their roots are pearls and gold, and their tops are all fruit.'" (al-Mundhiri)

The fruits of Paradise

Allah Almighty says:

> *"When they are given fruit there as provision, they say, 'This is what we were provided with before,' although they were only given a simulation of it."* (2:25)

The fruit of Paradise is different from the fruit of this world. In this world, you must go to the fruit and take it or someone else has to bring it to you, but in Paradise the fruit will come to you simply through your desiring to find it in your hand. Although there is some correspondence between the fruits of this world and the fruits of Paradise, the fruits in Paradise are in reality not like the fruits of this world, in either taste or scent. When the people of the Garden see its fruits, they say that they are similar to the mangoes or figs they ate in this world; but they are in fact completely different. The shape is similar but the taste is different. In this world every type of food generates waste, which must be excreted by the eater, but the food of the Next World generates no waste. People there will eat whatever they without needing to excrete anything at all, beware of the difference in formation between the fruits of this world and the Next World.

According to Ibn al-Qayyim there is a difference of opinion regarding what is meant by the above *ayat*. Does it mean that the fruits referred to are like those they had in this world – or like those they have already had before in Paradise? Ibn 'Abbas, Ibn Mas'ud ﷺ and others related that some of the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ said that the words "*This is what we were provided with before*" mean that when the inhabitants of Paradise are given fruit there, they will look at it and say, "This is what we were given before in the world." Others, however, said that the meaning of the words is: "This what we were given before of the fruits of Paradise", owing to the strong similarity between them in colour

and taste. Those who hold this position have several proofs for their position:

- The resemblance of the fruits of Paradise to one another is far greater than any resemblance between them and the fruits of this world and so they think they are receiving the same fruit again.

- The fact that when one of the fruits of Paradise is removed from them, another just like it takes its place. Abu 'Ubayda ﷺ mentioned the fruit of Paradise and said, "Whenever a fruit is removed, another sits in its place." (at-Tabari)

- It is known that not everything in Paradise is the same as the fruits which people know in this world. Many of the people of Paradise have fruits there which they do not recognise from this world.

As for the words of the Almighty: "*They were only given a simulation of it*," a group, including Ibn Mas'ud, Ibn 'Abbas and some other Companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said that this means that they are similar in colour and look, not in taste. According to Mujahid, they are similar in colour and different in taste. One group said that the meaning of the *ayat* is that it resembles the fruit of this world but that the fruit of Paradise is better and more delicious. 'Abd ar-Rahman ibn Zayd said, "They recognise their names as they did in this world: apple for apple and pomegranate for pomegranate. They will say in Paradise, 'This is what we were provided with before and we were given its like.' They recognise it but it is not similar in taste."

Allah says: "*Gardens of Eden, whose gates will be open to them, where they will recline, calling for plentiful fruit and drink.*" (38:50-51) And He says: "*They will call there for fruit of every kind.*" (44:55). This indicates their security from it ever being cut off. The Almighty also says: "*That is Paradise you will inherit for what you did. There will be many fruits in it for you to eat.*" (43:72-73) And: "*Fruits in abundance, never failing, unrestricted.*" (56: 32-33) This

means that they are not seasonal, existing at some times but not at others; nor are they denied to anyone who wants them. He also says: "*He will have a pleasant life in an elevated Garden, its ripe fruit hanging close to hand.*" (69:21-23) The word used for "ripe fruit", *qutuf*, is the plural of *qitf*, which means picked fruit, and *qatf* is the action of picking.

This means that its fruits are brought close to anyone who takes them so that he can pick them at will. Al-Bara' ibn 'Azib said, "He can take the fruit while he is asleep." (al-Mundhiri) Allah Almighty also says: "*Its shading branches will droop down over them, its ripe fruit hanging ready to be picked.*" (76:14) Ibn 'Abbas ﷺ said that this means that when anyone wants to take some of its fruits, it hangs down before him so that he can take what he wants. They can be picked while standing, sitting, or lying down, and so it is like His words: "*its ripe fruit hanging close to hand*" (69:23). The meaning is that the fruit is ripe and easy to pick.

The Almighty says: "*In them are fruits and date-palms and pomegranates.*" (55:68) Date-palms and pomegranates are singled out among fruits because of their excellence and nobility. They are among the best, most excellent and sweetest of fruits. The Almighty says: "*In it they will have fruit of every kind and forgiveness from their Lord.*" (47:15)

Abu Musa ﷺ narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Allah sent down Adam ﷺ from Paradise and taught him all the processes of life and provided him with the fruits of Paradise. So these fruits of yours come from the fruits of Paradise although they are subject to change and those do not change. (at-Tabari)." We find in *Sahih Muslim* that Jabir ﷺ reported that the Prophet ﷺ said, "I was shown Paradise so that it was as if I could take bunches from it." Ibn 'Abbas ﷺ said, "The fruits of Paradise are like jars and buckets, whiter than milk, sweeter than honey, and softer than butter. There is no blight in them." Al-Bara' ibn 'Azib ﷺ said, "The people of Paradise will eat from the fruit of Paradise standing, sitting and reclining in any state they wish." (al-Mundhiri) We find in the *hadith* of Laqit ibn Sabra which 'Abdullah ibn Ahmad related in an *isnad* from his father and others: "I asked, 'Messenger of Allah, what will the people of Paradise see in it?' He

replied, 'Rivers of purified honey and rivers of wine, in whose cups there is no headache or regret, and rivers of milk whose taste has not changed and water which never becomes stagnant. And there are fruits, by the life of your God, which they know and, in addition to them, a similar number of fruits better than them.'"

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The Companions of Paradise

Allah Almighty says: *"They are the Companions of Paradise."* (7:42) The use of the word "companions" here implies that they are people who will never be parted from Paradise, in the sense that a companion is someone who always remains closely attached to the object of his companionship. Paradise desires them as they desire it. They will be in it forever. The blessing of it does not leave them nor do they leave it. They do not leave it through death; they have there perpetual life in which there is no alteration of state. Health is not a problem there, for that would imply the possibility of illness; nor is there any concept of wealth, for that would imply the possibility of poverty. Changes of that sort only exist in this world. Allah makes us aware that such blessings come from Him so that we may be thankful to Him and not attribute them to ourselves, our faculties or our own efforts. The blessings of Paradise are more numerous and far greater than even the most extreme desires of its inhabitants, so that a person there will have every possible need met – and even more than that. When a person desires something in Paradise, he finds it there in front of him just by thinking of it.

Similarly, no rancour or spite will be experienced by the inhabitants of Paradise. Allah Almighty says: *"We will strip away any rancour in their hearts"* (7:43, 15:47). In other words, when the inhabitants of Paradise enter it, they will all experience greater delight than they were expecting to feel. Struggle, discord and rancour in this world come about because people want to have sole possession of particular blessings. If anyone has authority and power, there is always someone else who wants to take it from him. If anyone has wealth, someone else wants to have the same amount of wealth as him. This competitive struggle for blessings does not exist in Paradise, because everyone there has more of the blessings of Allah than they could possibly desire and whenever they wish for anything, they find it. As well as this, Allah Almighty purifies the souls of the people of Paradise of all negative qualities. If, for instance, you have a righteous wife but there are some things you

do not like about her, Allah will purify her of the things you do not like. That is why Allah Almighty says, *"They shall have there spouses of perfect purity."* (2:25) The same thing applies if a wife does not like something about her husband: Allah will remove it from him.

The categories of people who receive the good news of Paradise

Differentiating those who merit the good news of Paradise from others, Allah Almighty says: *"Give good news to those who believe and do right actions that they will have Gardens with rivers flowing under them."* (2:25) And He says: *"Yes, the friends of Allah will feel no fear and know no sorrow: those who believe and are godfearing, there is good news for them in the life of this world and in the Next World. There is no changing the words of Allah. That is the great victory!"* (10:62-64) The Almighty also says: *"The angels descend on those who say, 'Our Lord is Allah,' and then go straight: 'Do not fear and do not grieve but rejoice in Paradise you have been promised.'"* (41:30) And further: *"Those who listen well to what is said and follow the best of it, they are the ones whom Allah has guided; they are the people of intelligence."* (39:18) He also says: *"Those who believe and emigrate and strive in the Way of Allah with their wealth and themselves have a higher rank with Allah. They are the ones who are victorious. Their Lord gives them the good news of His mercy and good pleasure and Gardens where they shall enjoy everlasting delight, remaining in them timelessly for ever and ever. Truly there is an immense reward with Allah."* (9:20-22)

Allah says: *"Whereas those who believe and do right actions will be in lush Meadows of Gardens. They shall have whatever they wish for with their Lord. That is the great favour. That is the good news which Allah gives to His slaves who believe and do right actions."* (42:22-23) In a passage which comprehensively details the attributes of those destined for Paradise, the Almighty says, *"It is the believers who are successful..."* continuing to His words, *"such people are the inheritors who will inherit Firdaws, remaining in it forever."* (23:1-11) And in the *Musnad* and elsewhere it is reported that the Prophet ﷺ said,

"Ten *ayat*s were revealed to me. Whoever acts upon them will enter Paradise." Then he recited, "*It is the believers who are successful*" and the following ten *ayat*s. The Almighty says:

> "*Men and women who are Muslims, men and women who are believers, men and women who are obedient, men and women who are truthful, men and women who are steadfast, men and women who are humble, men and women who give* sadaqa, *men and women who fast, men and women who guard their private parts, and men and women who remember Allah much: Allah has prepared forgiveness for them and an immense reward.*" (33:35)

And also:

> "*Those who repent, those who worship, those who praise, those who fast, those who bow, those who prostrate, those who command the right, those who forbid the wrong, those who observe the limits of Allah: give good news to the believers.*" (9:112)

The Almighty also says:

> "*Race each other to forgiveness from your Lord and a Garden as wide as the heavens and the earth, prepared for the godfearing: those who give in times of both ease and hardship, those who control their rage and pardon other people – Allah loves good-doers – those who, when they act indecently or wrong themselves, remember Allah and ask forgiveness for their bad actions (and who can forgive bad actions except Allah?) – and do not knowingly persist in what they were doing. Their recompense is forgiveness from their Lord, and Gardens with rivers flowing under them, remaining in them timelessly, for ever. How excellent is the reward of those who act!*" (3:133-136)

And further:

> "*You who believe, shall I direct you to a transaction which will save you from a painful punishment? It is to believe in Allah and His Messenger and strive in the Way of Allah with your wealth and your selves. That is better for you if you only knew…*" con-

tinuing to His words "*give good news to the believers.*" (61:10-13)

Elsewhere the Almighty says:

> "*For those who fear standing before their Lord there are two Gardens*" (55:46), and "*But as for him who feared the station of his Lord and forbade the lower self its appetites, Paradise will be his refuge.*" (79: 40-41)

According to Ibn al-Qayyim, there are many such references in the Qur'an, and three characteristics apply to all the people who receive the good news of Paradise. The first is faith and *taqwa*, the second is actions performed sincerely for Allah, and the third is conformity to the Sunna. The people who combine these three characteristics are those who can expect good news, to the exclusion of others who do not. They in turn can be summed up in two fundamental principles: sincerity in obedience Allah and benevolence to His creation. They in turn derive from one basic principle: harmonising with Allah in what He loves. And there is no way to achieve that except by embodying the example of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ outwardly and inwardly.

As for the actions which stem from this principle, they are about seventy in number. The greatest of them is the statement 'There is no god but Allah' and the least of them is removing something harmful from the road. The rest all lie between these two and derive from affirming everything that the Messenger ﷺ said and obeying him in respect of everything he instructed us to do, whether by way of obligation or recommendation. Among these things is firm belief in the Names, Attributes, actions and signs of Allah without deviating from them, denying them, or qualifying them in any way. As Imam ash-Shafi'i said, "Praise be to Allah, Who is as He has described Himself and is beyond any description His creation can give of Him."

Abu Hurayra ﷺ reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "The first group to enter Paradise will be like the moon on the night of the full moon. They will not need to spit or blow their noses or defecate. All their utensils will be golden and their combs

will be of gold and silver. Their braziers will burn fragrant aloes-wood and their perspiration will be like musk. Each of them will have two wives, so beautiful that the marrow of their thighs will be able to be seen through the flesh, and there will be no disagreement or ill will of any kind between them. Their hearts will be as one, glorifying Allah morning and evening." (al-Bukhari)

'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ﷺ reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Do you know who will be the first to enter Paradise among Allah's creation?" They answered, "Allah and His Messenger know best." He said, "The first to enter Paradise among Allah's creation will be poor emigrants who manned the frontiers and defended them against hated things. Some of them died before being being able to achieve an object of their heart's desire. Allah Almighty will say to whomever He wishes of His angels, 'Go to them and greet them.' The angels will say, 'We are the inhabitants of Your heaven and the best of Your creation. Do you command us to go to those people and greet them?' He will say, 'They are slaves who worshipped Me and did not associate anything with Me and manned the frontiers and defended them from hated things. Some of them died before being being able to achieve what their hearts desired.' The angels will then go to them and come to them from every door, saying: *'Peace be upon you because of your steadfastness. How wonderful is the Ultimate Abode!'* (13:24)" (Ahmad)

Burayda ﷺ reported: "The Messenger of Allah ﷺ called Bilal and said, 'Bilal, what has allowed you to precede me into Paradise? Whenever I enter Paradise I hear the sound of your sandals in front of me. I entered Paradise yesterday and heard the sound of your sandals in front me. I also went to a very imposing palace made of gold and asked, 'Who does this palace belong to?' They replied, 'To an Arab man.' I said, 'I am an Arab. Who does this palace belong to?' They answered, 'To a man of Quraysh.' I said, 'I am a Qurayshi. Who does this palace belong to?' They replied, 'To a man of the community of Muhammad ﷺ.' 'I am Muhammad,' I said, 'Who does this palace belong to?' They said, 'To 'Umar ibn al-Khattab.' Bilal said, 'Messenger of Allah, I have never called the *adhan* without praying two *rak'ats* afterwards. I

[illegible] never broken *wudu'* without renewing my *wudu'*. I thought that I owed Allah two *rak'ats.*' The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'For both of them, then.'" (at-Tirmidhi)

General chapter on the attributes of the people of Paradise

Allah Almighty says:

> *"Race each other to forgiveness from your Lord and a Garden as wide as the heavens and the earth, prepared for the godfearing: those who give in times of both ease and hardship, those who control their rage and pardon other people – Allah loves good-doers – those who, when they act indecently or wrong themselves, remember Allah and ask forgiveness for their bad actions (and who can forgive bad actions except Allah?) and do not knowingly persist in what they were doing. Their recompense is forgiveness from their Lord, and Gardens with rivers flowing under them, remaining in them timelessly, for ever. How excellent is the reward of those who act!"* (3:133-136)

The Almighty also says:

> *"The forerunners – the first of the Muhajirun and the Ansar – and those who followed them in doing good: Allah is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him. He has prepared Gardens for them with rivers flowing under them, for ever and ever. That is the great victory."* (9:100)

He also says:

> *"The believers are those whose hearts tremble when Allah is mentioned, whose faith is increased when His Signs are recited to them, and who put their trust in their Lord; those who establish the prayer and give of what We have provided for them. They are in truth the believers. They have high ranks with their Lord and forgiveness and generous provision."* (8:2-4)

According to Ibn al-Qayyim there are four categories of inhabitants of Paradise. Allah Almighty specifies them in His words,

"Whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger, shall be with those whom Allah has blessed: the Prophets, the truly sincere, the martyrs and the righteous. What excellent company those are!" (4:69) We ask Allah to place us among them by His favour and generosity!

Abu Hurayra ﷺ reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ commanded Bilal to call out among the people that only a Muslim soul will enter Paradise. (al-Bukhari) One variant has: "... only a believer will enter Paradise." Haritha ibn Wahb ﷺ reported that he heard the Prophet ﷺ say, "Shall I inform you about the people of Paradise? All who are weak or thought to be weak. If they were to take an oath by Allah, Allah would carry it out. Shall I tell you about the people of Hell? All those who are coarse, domineering, and arrogant." (al-Bukhari) 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'As ﷺ reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "The people of Fire are every arrogant, uncouth, stout, proud one, amassing wealth and refusing to give charity. The people Paradise are the weak and overpowered." (Ahmad) Ibn 'Abbas ﷺ reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Shall I tell you about men who will be among the People of Paradise? Prophets will be in Paradise. Martyrs will be in Paradise. The truthful will be in the Garden. Children will be in Paradise. A man who visits his brother in a part of the city for the sake of Allah will be in Paradise. Shall I tell you about women who will be among the people of Paradise? Loving women with many children."

Speaking true words is one of the Attributes of the People of Paradise

Allah Almighty says:

> *"Allah will reward them for what they say with Gardens with rivers flowing under them, remaining in them for ever in them. That is the recompense of the good-doers."* (5:85)

True words may be spoken at any every place and time. The Abyssinian Negus said them to the people of rank among Quraysh whose falsehood overwhelmed them. That is why it is said that the word of truth always has weight. When he heard what had been revealed of the Qur'an in *Surat Maryam*, he said, "This and that which 'Isa brought have come from the same niche."

Quraysh sent 'Amr ibn al-'As and 'Abdullah ibn Abi Rabi'a with gifts to Negus and his patriarchs to ask him to return the Muslims who had emigrated to Abyssinia. The Negus sent for the Muslims and asked them about their *deen*.

Ja'far ibn Abi Talib ﷺ said, "O king, we were an idolatrous people, worshipping idols, consuming carrion, neglecting our neighbours and making the unlawful lawful. Some of us would shed blood, both our own and others'. We did not consider anything either lawful or unlawful. Then Allah sent us a Prophet from among ourselves whose fidelity, truthfulness and trustworthiness we recognised. He called us to worship Allah alone with no partner, to maintain ties with our kin, and to be good neighbours, and to pray and fast and not worship other than Allah."

He asked, "Do you have with you any example of what he brought?" He had summoned his patriarchs and ordered them to unroll the scrolls around him.

"Yes," answered Ja'far.

He said, "Come and recite to me what he brought."

So Ja'far recited to him the beginning of *Surat Maryam*. By Allah, the Negus wept until his beard was wet. His patriarchs wept until their scrolls were wet.Then he said, "These words come from the same niche which Musa brought. Go, rightly guided."

After this first attempt of the delegation of Quraysh to seek the return of the emigrants failed, on the following day 'Amr ibn al-'As brought up the position of the Muslims with regard to 'Isa ﷺ. He said to the Negus, "O king, they say something terrible about 'Isa."

So the Negus sent to them to question them; Ja'far told him, "We say that he is the servant of Allah, His Messenger, His Word, and His spirit which He cast to the Virgin Mary."

The Negus said, "'Isa son of Maryam is not more than what you said by the amount of this stick!" and he guaranteed the security of the Muslims, allowing them to stay in the best neighbourhood. It was a true word which has weight. Allah Almighty gives a generous gift to everyone who supports the Truth, even with a word. He is the Thankful, who gives much for little, and the Beneficent, who multiplies the reward of those who do good.

We should recognise that such words have great importance. The statement of the Negus was momentous, but unfortunately his life was too short for him to proceed to act on what he said. He said what he said, and the Messenger of Allah ﷺ entrusted him with arranging his marriage to Umm Habiba bint Abi Sufyan. So he made the contract for the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and gave her her dowry from his property. However, he was unable to implement the rules of Islam because he died before they reached him. That is why it was enough for him to make this statement, and it explains the Prophet ﷺ prayed for him the funeral prayer for an absent Muslim.

There is also the story of Mukhayriq, the Jew whose heart absorbed Islam and was filled with it. He was very wealthy and said to the Jews, "All my wealth should go to Muhammad and I will go out to fight together with him." He went out to fight with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and he was killed as a martyr without having prayed a single *rak'at* in his life.

The Almighty says: "*Allah will reward them for what they say with Gardens with rivers flowing under them.*" (5:85) The Real here

Speaking true words is one of the Attributes of the People of Paradise

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confirms for us that we will have a full reward for every activation of faith, even if it is just a word. We know that faith in the context of Makka was faith by the word: people believed when most of the rules governing action had still not been revealed. The majority of such rules were revealed in Madina. We know from that that Allah will repay the believers for simply making the statement of belief. Allah has bestowed on them a good reward and called them good-doers. That is similar to what happened with the Negus. He endorsed faith without having had the Call to faith directed at him. That was before the Messenger of Allah ﷺ wrote to the kings, calling them to faith. Thus the Negus was a good-doer because he believed before he was asked to do so.

Truthfulness is one the attributes of the People of Paradise

Allah Almighty says:

> *"Allah will say, 'This is the Day when the truthfulness of the truthful will benefit them. They will have Gardens with rivers flowing under them, remaining in them timelessly forever. Allah is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him. That is the Great Victory."* (5:119)

We find in a *hadith* in a *Sahih al-Bukhari* that 'Abdullah ﷺ related that the Prophet ﷺ said, "Truthfulness leads to piety and piety leads to Paradise. A man should be truthful until he is written down as truthful with Allah. Lying leads to deviance and deviance leads to Hell. A man will lie until he is written down as a liar in the sight of Allah."

We recognise that truthfulness will be beneficial on the Day of Rising – but only truthfulness in this world. Truthfulness will not help on the Day of Resurrection, as we know from the truthful statement of the accursed Iblis in the Noble Qur'an: "*Allah made you a promise, a promise of truth, and I made you a promise but broke my promise.*" (14:22) Truthfulness then will not benefit anyone, because the Next World is not the domain of accountability. That is why Allah says: "*This is the Day when the truthfulness of the truthful will benefit them,*" referring to their truthfulness at the time when they were accountable for what they did in this world. For that they will receive a great reward and the good pleasure of Allah:

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"They shall have Gardens with rivers flowing under them, remaining in them timelessly for ever. Allah is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him."

In answer to the question of how a slave can be pleased with his Lord, we reply that when a believing slave sees the reward prepared for him in the Next World, he is filled with joy and says, "*Praise be to Allah Who has fulfilled His promise to us and made us inheritors of this land, letting us settle in Paradise wherever we want.*" (39:74) This *ayat* is about the Day on which the truthfulness of the truthful will benefit them. It is "*the Great Victory*" which Allah mentions numerous times in His Book. It is as if there was, on the one hand a kind of victory which is not great, and, on the other, a victory which certainly is.

The victory which is not great is the one people claim for themselves in this world, the domain of responsibility: the enjoyment of their brief life here and now. It is as if they have been successful, as if they have been victorious. In reality it is not the Great Victory, because remorse will follow it. Any pleasure followed by remorse cannot really be considered a victory. The pleasures of this world, and all the blessing in it, are continually under threat for two reasons. Firstly, there is always the danger of the blessings of this world disappearing; how many people we see who that happens to! Secondly, the blessing inevitably vanishes with death. As for the "Great Victory", that is a blessing which no one can prevent and nothing can stop, and which will never disappear.

Controlling rage is one of the attributes of the People of Paradise

Allah Almighty says:

"*Race each other to forgiveness from your Lord and a Garden as wide as the heavens and the earth, prepared for the godfearing, those who give in times both of ease and hardship, those who control their rage and pardon other people. Allah loves good-doers.*" (3:133-134)

So control of rage is one of the attributes of the godfearing. We find an example of this in what happened after the Battle of Uhud. Hamza, the Leader of the Martyrs and the uncle of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was killed, and he was not only killed but mutilated and some of his liver was taken and chewed by Hind. The Prophet ﷺ was horrified and sickened by this event and said, in the heat of the moment, "If Allah gives me victory over Quraysh in some situation, I will mutilate thirty of their men." This is a case in which unbridled anger erupted in the heat of the moment when the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was outraged by what had happened to one of the people he loved best in the world. Then Allah revealed: "*If you want to retaliate, retaliate to the same degree as the injury done to you. But if you are patient, it is better to be patient.*" (16:126)

In His words "control rage", the root of the word for "control" (*kazm*) is connected to the process of filling leather water-skins which, as we know, were used in the past by water-bearers to carry water from one place to another. When the bag is filled, its end must be tightly tied to stop anything spilling out of it and the word used for this action of sealing the filled skin by tying it tightly is *kazm*. If it is tied too loosely, the water will escape from the water bag when it is loaded onto the back of a camel, so it must be tied very tightly to prevent that happening. That is the same as what must be done with rage in the human soul. Allah does not

forbid its occurrence, because it is a natural human reaction to certain situations. Islam does not expect believers to be iron-clad robots, devoid of feelings. Another example of that is the reaction of the Messenger ﷺ when his son Ibrahim died and he ﷺ said: "The eye weeps and the heart is sad. We only say what pleases our Lord. We are sad at your leaving, Ibrahim." He reacted normally to the sad event and his tears flowed.

No, Allah did not create believers out of stone and He expects them to react naturally to events. He also, however, wants that reaction to be proportionate, in order that it may be of benefit and not destructive. For this reason He has given us laws to enable us to contain our feelings within right and proper limits. So a believer should not react to anything in a way which will anger his Lord; his reaction must be balanced. A certain amount of anger is needed in order that the Way of Allah may be defended, but believers must control it so that it does not overpower correct behaviour and good management.

There are three permitted degrees of anger management. In the first the angry reaction occurs but it is contained and controlled, so that although it is expressed, any negative consequences which might result from it are prevented. In the second the angry reaction is mitigated by the exercise of forgiveness for the act that caused it, which removes the anger from the heart, so that it is as if nothing had happened in the first place. The third degree goes even further than this and involves reacting in an opposite way, so that instead of becoming angry the person concerned acts well towards the one who provoked him, replacing evil with good. If, on the other hand, no restraint is shown and anger is allowed to be expressed in an uncontrolled way, it is probable that the person who is the brunt of that anger will not be able to control his reaction either. Then there is likely to be an escalation of violence and rage, which can on occasion continue through generations. When anger is controlled, however, the angry person is often brought to his senses and the matter usually ends there.

Constant remembrance and asking forgiveness are among the attributes of the People of Paradise

Allah Almighty says: "*Those who, when they act indecently or wrong themselves, remember Allah and ask forgiveness for their wrong actions – and who will forgive wrong actions except Allah? – and do not knowingly persist in what they were doing.*" (3:135) An indecent action is a sin. The *ayat* tells us that someone who acts indecently or wrongs himself inevitably forgets Allah. Allah is not in the mind of a person at the moment they commit an indecent action or wrong themselves. Such a person does not see Allah and does not have before their eyes His reward and punishment in the Next World. If they did, they would surely refrain from acting in that way. That is also the case with someone who is heedless in his obedience to Allah. Were he truly aware of Allah and of His generosity towards those who have awareness of Him, he would not be slapdash in the way he obeyed Him. That is why the Almighty speaks of those who "*remember Allah and ask forgiveness for their wrong actions*". If someone asks for forgiveness for his wrong action, it means that they must have remembered Allah.

The position of the scholars in relation to indecent actions varies. Some scholars have what are meant are major wrong actions, and that "wronging oneself" refers to minor wrong actions. Other scholars say that the words "indecent action" refer to outright fornication, and that anything less than that is a minor wrong action. It must, however, be made clear here that there will remain on record no major wrong action when forgiveness is asked for – but also that there is no forgiveness when there is wilful persistence in that wrong action. And it is not for us to make light of our own errors and say, "This is a just minor wrong action" and "That is just a minor wrong action," because the assessment of what are minor and major wrong actions is not in our hands.

When we look at the words of Allah Almighty: "*Those who, when they act indecently or wrong themselves,*" it is clear that anyone who commits an indecent action also wrongs himself. Why, then is

the conjunction "or" used rather than "and" in this instance, which seems to imply that there is a difference between the two things? It is because someone who commits an indecent action is satisfying an appetite and gaining pleasure, even if only on a short term basis, whereas someone who simply wrongs himself receives no benefit whatsoever from his action. For example, someone who perjures himself may not achieve any benefit for himself; the benefit goes to the person he testifies for. All the false witness gets is punishment in the Next World. Someone who commits an indecent action, on the other hand, gets some fleeting enjoyment in this world and after that will have punishment in the Next World. Allah Almighty does not forbid the pleasure of this world, but He says about it: "*Say: 'The enjoyment of this world is very brief.'*" (4:77)

The Almighty says: "*They ask forgiveness for their wrong actions – and who will forgive wrong actions except Allah?*" A wrong action is one which deviates from the Way of Right Guidance. It occurs when an instruction telling us how to keep to that Way is not carried out or a prohibition is not observed. Only something which has been clearly defined as such by Allah in His legislation of the laws of His Way can be called a wrong action, just as in human legislation we say that there can be no crime without a clear law and no punishment without a crime; it is necessary for there to be clear textual evidence in law that something is a crime before it is possible to stipulate any kind of punishment for it. Naturally, that also applies where the Way of Allah is concerned. He first informs us what the wrong actions are, and only after that does he specify the punishments which anyone who commits one of those wrong actions will receive.

We draw attention at this point to the words of the Divine Truth: "*and do not knowingly persist in what they were doing.*" This means that asking forgiveness is not just a matter of saying the words "I ask forgiveness of Allah" after committing a wrong action. The words "I ask forgiveness of Allah" must be accompanied by a resolve never to commit that wrong action again. This does not necessarily mean that you will not commit the wrong action again – wrong actions can happen – but at the time you ask for forgiveness there must be a firm resolve not to repeat it. What you must not do is say to yourself, "I will commit that wrong

…ion and then ask forgiveness again for it." If you do, you will be …e someone who mocks their Lord. Anyway, the words of the …ighty "*do not knowingly persist in what they were doing*" make it …ear that there can be no punishment unless something is clearly …rime; and for something to be a crime there must be textual evi…ence to that effect. Allah teaches us firstly by acquainting us with …hat constitutes wrong action, then by telling us what the punish…ent is, and finally by showing us how to ask for forgiveness.

Spending secretly and publicly is one of the attributes of the People of Paradise

Allah Almighty says: "*those who give in times both of ease and hardship, those who control their rage and pardon other people. Allah loves good-doers.*" (3:134) Spending in ease means spending out of gratitude, and spending in hardship means spending by way of entreaty. When believers enjoy blessings in a state of ease they are grateful for them and share them with others. In times of hardship their need makes them turn to Allah and they spend on others to earn the favour of their Lord. So they spend both in hardship and ease. Ease makes many people forget that their blessings are from Allah; they come to think that those blessings are the result of their own efforts. Hardship makes many people forgetful of Allah, aware only of their own suffering, and prevents them from attending to the sufferings of others. Believers, on the other hand, never forget their Lord. They hold to His command by spending in hardship and ease, and this gives them a peace of mind which other people do not have. That is why the Almighty says: "*Their recompense is forgiveness from their Lord and Gardens with rivers flowing under them.*" (3:136)

Recompense is usually received by workers for work they have done. The wages that workers are paid are normally based on their employers' evaluation of the work they do. If several employers are seeking a worker with unusual skills, he will be able to demand high wages. So the question is generally one of the need of the employer as against the need of the employee. When we look at the idea of recompense in the Next World, however, we find that we are dealing with a God who has no need whatsoever of what we do – yet despite that He has appointed a wage for our work. Not only will He give us a reward for this work He has no need of, He also says: "This wage is the lowest limit of what you will get; I am also able to multiply this wage and be generous to you far beyond the wage I have stipulated." If you employ someone to

work for you, you will pay him what will be enough to cover his daily expenses and perhaps a little more. But when you receive payment from Allah, He gives you vastly more than that. He says: "*How excellent is the reward of those who act.*" (29:58)

Endeavour and Patience are among the Attributes of the People of Paradise

The Almighty says:

> *"Or did you imagine that you were going enter Paradise without Allah knowing those among you who had struggled and knowing the steadfast?"* (3:142)

Faith is not just a matter of words. It is an experienced reality, subject to testing and dependent on successfully passing that test. You should not assume that you will have an easy passage and that it is enough for you to say, "We have borne the demands of the Truth." No: if you are truthful in what you say, you must be a model of right guidance, particularly in a situation where the Way of Truth is not being strongly upheld. Admission to Paradise is conditional upon an examination which all believers must pass.

The Almighty says: "*without Allah knowing those among you who had struggled and knowing the steadfast.*" Hearing that, we must recognise that Allah really does have pre-eternal knowledge of those who will struggle and be steadfast. At the same time, however, we must realise that Allah's confirmation of that knowledge will be based entirely on the actions in this world undertaken by the people concerned on their own account.

Obeying Allah and His Messenger is one of the Attributes of the People of Paradise

Allah Almighty says:

> *"As for those who obey Allah and His Messenger, We shall admit them to Gardens."* (4:13)

Those who obey Allah and His Messenger are those who in this world accept the obligatory practices prescribed by Allah and implement them. Their reward is to be admitted into Paradise in the Hereafter. The question is whether admittance to Paradise is part and parcel of following the *Deen* or rather the reward for doing so. The answer is that it is the reward for following the *Deen*. The *Deen* is about travelling through this world. Whoever travels on the Way of Allah in this world will enter Paradise in the Hereafter. The Next World, however, is not the context of the *Deen*; the context of the *Deen* is this world. Beware of saying that the context of the *Deen* is the Next World because the Next World, is the realm of repayment.

Let us take an example. Is success in an exam the same as the subject matter of the courses which a student studies throughout the year and on which the exam is based? The courses which a student studies constitute the subject matter to be examined. In a similar way our life in this world can be seen as the subject matter of the *Deen*, and the Next World is where the results of our studies will become apparent in terms of success or failure. That is why you must be careful not to differentiate between this world and the *Deen*. There is no division between this world and the *Deen*, because this world is the context of the *Deen*. At the same time, this world is the polar opposite of the Next World. This world is the tillage and the Next World is the harvest. That is why we refute anyone who says that this world is separate from the *Deen*.

It may be that someone will ask why the word "Gardens" is in the plural in this *ayat*. Allah Almighty says in *Surat ar-Rahman*: "*For those who fear standing before their Lord there are two Gardens.*" (55:46) If someone obeys Allah and His Messenger, Allah will admit him into one Garden, two Gardens, or however many Gardens He wills. Allah Almighty begins *Surat ar-Rahman* with His noble words: "*The All-Merciful taught the Qur'an. He created man.*" (55:1-3) After that He says: "*He created man from dry earth like baked clay and He created the jinn from a fusion of fire.*" (55:14-15) He then says, "*Soon shall We settle your affairs, you two weighty throngs.*" (55:31), referring to both jinn and men. So are those who fear standing before their Lord from the jinn or mankind? Some of the jinn will have one Garden and some of mankind will have another Garden, and it may be that these are the two Gardens referred to.

There are also those who say that there are two Gardens for every individual man and jinn because Allah does not have any limit where space is concerned. When He wished before time to create creation, He counted the number of human beings from Adam until the Last Hour. He treated each as an obedient believer, and so created a place for every individual in Paradise. He also treated each as disobedient, and created a place for him in Hell-fire. In other words, there can never be a question of lack of space in either. When the people of Paradise take up their places there, the places in Paradise reserved for the unbelievers, which they would have taken up had they become believers, remain unoccupied. That is why the Almighty says: "*That is Paradise you shall inherit for what you did.*" (43:72) The believers will inherit what had been prepared for others had they believed. So we find that all possible interpretations are borne out by the text of the Qur'an.

The majority of the people of Paradise

'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud ﷺ said, "The Messenger of Allah ﷺ asked us, 'Would you be content to be a quarter of the people of Paradise - to have a quarter of it and everyone else have three-quarters?' They replied, 'Allah and His Messenger know best.' He asked, 'Would you be content to be a third of it?' They said, 'That is more!' He said, "Would you content to have a half of it?' They said, 'That is even more.' The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: 'The people of Paradise on the Day of Resurrection will consist of one hundred and twenty rows. You make up eighty of them.'" (Ahmad)

Ibn 'Abbas ﷺ reported that the Prophet ﷺ said, "All the nations were shown to me, and I saw a Prophet with a small group, a Prophet with just a man or two, and a Prophet with no one with him at all. Then an enormous mass appeared before me and I thought that it was my Community. I was told, 'This is Musa ﷺ and his people. Look at the horizon.' I looked and there was an enormous mass. I was told, 'Look at the other horizon.' There was another enormous mass. I was told, 'This is your Community. Seventy thousand of them will enter Paradise without reckoning and without punishment.'" Then he rose and entered his house. The people started talking about those who were to enter Paradise without reckoning or punishment. Some of them said, "Perhaps it means those who kept the company of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ." Some of them said, "Perhaps it means those who were born in Islam and never associated anything with Allah." They mentioned various possibilities. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ came out to them and asked, "What are you discussing?" They told him and he said, "They are those who do not use incantation, do not seek omens, are not cauterised, and trust in their Lord." 'Ukkasha ibn Mihsan rose and said, "Ask Allah to put me among them." He said, "You are one of them," Then another man rose and said, "Ask Allah to put me among them." He said, "'Ukkasha has beaten you to it." (al-Bukhari and Muslim)

The Forerunners and those who have followed them in doing good

The Almighty says:

> *"The Forerunners – the first of the Muhajirun and Ansar - and those who have followed them in doing good: Allah is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him. He has prepared Gardens for them with rivers flowing under them, remaining in them timelessly, for ever. That is the great victory."* (9:100)

A forerunner is someone who is the first to do something before other people start doing it. All of us, praise be to Allah, are believers: those who believed first, and those who came to belief later on. The question is whether the firstness referred to is just a matter of time or also a matter of the degree of belief involved. Precedence in time is evident where those who were contemporary with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ are concerned. The meaning is confined to those who came first to faith in Makka, and those who first helped in Madina. They are the forerunners. So one might think that what is meant by the forerunners are those who preceded in time. But we know that those who emigrated with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ were not all the Muslims of Makka; and not all of the Ansar among the people of Madina were considered forerunners either.

Allah Almighty says in *Surat al-Waqi'a*: *"The forerunners, the forerunners, those are the ones brought near."* (56:10-11) Then after them in the rank come *"The Companions of the Right. What of the Companions of the Right?"* (56:27) Then Allah defines those forerunners and says: *"A large group of the earlier people but few of the later."* (56:13-14) That is why whenever someone comes and says, "None of the community of Muhammad ﷺ later than his own time will be able to reach a high station like that which the Companions reached, because Allah says '*the forerunners, the*

..." we say, "No. Look at the words of the Almighty: '*A large group of the earlier people but few of the later.*' This indicates that some of those who come after the time of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ will also attain that high degree. Allah is letting us know that until the Last Day, there will be those among the community of Muhammad ﷺ who reach the same highly-elevated station as that attained by the Companions ﷺ.

The Prophet ﷺ reassured those who were not living in his time when he said, "I wish that we could see our brothers." They said, "Are we not your brothers, Messenger of Allah?" He said, "You are my Companions. Our brothers are those who have not yet come." They asked, "How can you know any of your community who have not yet come, Messenger of Allah?" He said, "Do you not think that if a man had horses with white blazes which were among completely black horses, he would recognise his horses?" "Yes, indeed, Messenger of Allah," they replied. He said, "They will come with white blazes from *wudu'* and I will precede them to the Basin. Men will be driven away from my Basin as a stray camel is driven away. I will call to them, 'Will you come?' It will be said, 'They changed things after you.' I will say 'Far! Far!'" (Muslim) This in fact refers even to people in our own time but who are nevertheless the "Forerunners" referred to in Allah's words: *"the Forerunners, the first of the Muhajirun"*?

We know that the Forerunners among the *Muhajirun* definitely included the people of Badr who went out from Madina and participated in the first battle of Islam. They went to war against the army of Quraysh who came out from Makka to protect their caravan. They were those who hastened to *jihad* at the beginning of the fight for Islam. That is proved by the case of Hatib ibn Abi Balta'a, who at the time of the conquest of Makka wrote a letter to Quraysh warning them of the imminent attack. When 'Umar ibn al-Khattab wanted to kill him for his treachery the Prophet ﷺ said to Umar about Hatib: "He was present at Badr. What will tell you what that means? Perhaps Allah has looked down on the people of Badr and said, 'Do what you will, I have forgiven you.'" That is because the people of Badr entered the battle without preparation or supplies. It was as if Allah Almighty said to them, "Because of

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what you did I have forgiven you any evil deeds you may commit in future."

This incident is recorded in a hadith in the *Sahih* collections of both al-Bukhari and Muslim, from 'Ubaydullah ibn Rafi' who was the scribe of 'Ali. He said, "I heard 'Ali ﷺ say: 'The Messenger of Allah ﷺ sent me, az-Zubayr and al-Miqdad, saying, 'Go to the meadow of Khakh. There is a woman in a howdah who has a letter. Take it from her.' We went out and made our horses gallop. We said, 'Produce the letter.' She said, 'I do not have a letter.' We said, 'You will produce the letter or your clothes will be removed.' She brought it from her plaits and we took it to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. It contained something from Hatib ibn Abi Balta'a to some of the idol-worshippers of Makka, informing them about some of the business of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'Hatib! What is this?' He said, 'Messenger of Allah, do not be hasty with me. I am a man with close connections to the Quraysh. (Sufyan said, 'He was an ally of them and not one of them.) Some of the Muhajirun with you have relatives who will protect their families. Since I lacked that lineage among them, I wanted to have some favour with them with which to protect my relatives. I did not do it out of disbelief or apostasy from my *deen* nor contentment with disbelief after Islam.' The Prophet ﷺ said, 'He has spoken the truth.' 'Umar said, 'Let me cut off the head of this hypocrite, Messenger of Allah!' The latter said, 'He was present at Badr. What will tell you what that means? Perhaps Allah has looked at the people of Badr and said, "Do what you will, I have forgiven you."' Allah Almighty then revealed, *'O you who believe, do not take My enemy and your enemy as friends.'* (60:1)"

So the Forerunners of the Muhajirun are the people of Badr and the people of Hudaybiya, those who made the Pledge of Ridwan and returned with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ from their abandoned *'umra* after making a treaty with the Quraysh. The Forerunners of the Ansar are those who went to the Prophet ﷺ in Makka, gave him comfort and security, and pledged allegiance to him. There were twelve of them at the first Pledge of 'Aqaba and seventy-five at the second. They are the Forerunners of the Ansar. Then Allah added to them: *"Those who followed them in excelling in*

goodness." They are all those who have come after them, followed them, followed in their footsteps and clung to their *sunna*.

People of faith and right actions

Allah Almighty says:

"But as for those who believe and do right actions, We will admit them into Gardens with rivers flowing under them, remaining in them timelessly, for ever and ever. In them they will have spouses of perfect purity and We will admit them into cool refreshing shade." (4:57)

This *ayat* describes the reward of those who believe. We know that the last version of Allah's Message is that of Muhammad ﷺ, which makes the community of Muhammad ﷺ the community nearest in time to the final meeting with Allah. Human communities, starting from the time of Adam, have been spread over a huge historical timespan; but we Muslims are closest to the Last Hour. That is why the Prophet ﷺ said, holding two fingers together, "I was sent when I and the Hour are like this." (Ahmad)

That is why Allah Almighty did not, in this *ayat*, use the particle *sawfa*, indicating the distant future, as He did in some other cases when the intention is to give a warning to the unbelievers encouraging them to repent before it is too late. Rather He uses the letter *sin* to show that it is the immediate consequence of what they have done. The matter is not far away; it is close. That is why Allah expresses it using as a future particle just the prefix *sa-*.

People who obey Allah and His Messenger

Allah Almighty says:

"Whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger will be with those whom Allah has blessed: the Prophets, and the truly sincere, the martyrs and the righteous. What excellent company such people are!" (4:69)

The verb here is "obey" and the obedience is to Allah Almighty and the Messenger ﷺ, to what is prescribed by Allah and implemented by His Messenger ﷺ. In other words, it means whoever acts by the Book and *Sunna*. When you find the Messenger and Allah joined together in a sentence without repetition of the verb, you know that where action is concerned no distinction is being made. There are not two commands, there is only one: a word from Allah and its implementation by the Messenger ﷺ, for he is the model and the exemplar. In another context Allah says: *"They returned to disbelief after their Islam. They planned something which they did not achieve and they were vindictive for no other reason than that Allah and His Messenger had enriched them from His bounty. If they were to repent, it would be better for them."* (9:74) Wealth here is from Allah and His Messenger, because the Messenger only acted by the permission of his Lord and in obedience to His command. Hence the action is the same.

There is a case scholars use in discussion, which was one that also occupied many people who were contemporary with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. No one was turned away from his assembly ﷺ, and he would come and sit at the edge of the gathering. Anyone who wanted to see the Prophet ﷺ constantly could do so, and people could come to him whenever they wanted. Thawban, the *mawla* of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, had great love for him and could not bear to be away from him ﷺ. He came to the Prophet ﷺ one day with his face gaunt and looking very thin. Sorrow could be seen in his face. The Prophet ﷺ asked him, "What is wrong

with you, Thawban?" He said, "By Allah, I am not ill. I do not have any illness but I love you and I yearn for you. I know that in this world I can see you whenever I want but in the Next World you will go to 'Illiyun with the other Prophets. When I enter Paradise I will be in a house in a lower place than your house. If I do not enter it then I will never see you." (at-Tabari)

See how powerful was the love of Thawban for the Messenger of Allah ﷺ! Allah Almighty is kind to individuals like this lover whose mind was preoccupied with something which would not occur to the minds of many people. Allah Almighty says to such people: *"Whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger will be with those whom Allah has blessed: the Prophets, and the truly sincere, the martyrs and the righteous. What excellent company such people are!"* The specific cause of the revelation of this *ayat* was this distress of Thawban after he called attention to this anxiety which may occupy the minds of those who love the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He was reassured by knowing that "a man will be with the one he loves". This condition, however, is not unique to Thawban.

The words of Thawban were the reason for this matter being explained, but the same applies to the truly sincere, martyrs and righteous, so that all kinds of believers are included. We know, for instance, that Abu Bakr as-Siddiq, as his very name confirms, was one of the truly sincere. This was because he went to the utmost in confirming all that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said. When people said, "Your companion claims that he went to Jerusalem and returned in one night," what did Abu Bakr say? He said, "If he said that, he spoke the truth." This is true sincerity. Whenever Muhammad ﷺ said something, Abu Bakr confirmed it. He ﷺ did not wait until the Qur'an revealed the confirmation of the Messenger's words. He ﷺ said, "I am a Messenger" and Abu Bakr immediately said, "Yes."

The words of the Almighty "*What excellent company such people are!*" refer to the Prophets, the truly sincere, the martyrs and the righteous; there are no companions better than these. A companion (*rafiq*) is someone who is inseparable from you, both when you are at home and on a journey. That is why they say, "Get a companion before you travel. You will experience trouble and difficulty on the road because you have left your usual pattern of life, so

get a true companion before setting out." The word for companion *rafiq* is derived from the root *rafaqa*, which means ease, intimacy and rest.

So a person who obeys Allah and His Messenger is in the company of the Prophets, the truly sincere, martyrs and the righteous. But someone might ask, "How is it possible for these groups to be joined together in one place despite their different actions in this world? Does Allah not say, *'Man shall have nothing but what he strives for'* (53:39)?" In answer to that we say that all of them are the same in that they obey Allah and obey the Messenger; and it is this obedience and love for Allah and His Messenger that constitute the striving of His slaves. By that token there is no contradiction between the two *ayat*s because the striving is of the same nature in each instance and so it is right for them to have the company of the Prophets, truly sincere, martyrs and righteous. The company is an honour for all of them and all are at ease with it. The words *"We will strip away any rancour in their hearts"* (7:43) and *"That is favour from Allah, and Allah is sufficies as a Knower"* (4:70) go a long way towards explaining this phenomenon.

Allah's favour derives from a person's striving. In His words *'Man will have nothing but what he strives for'*, Allah states that you receive what you have merited: a just reward for fulfilment of responsibility. But our Lord does not say that this gift of Allah is a matter of rights and justice; rather it is a matter of Divine favour. It is Allah's favour that brings about the joy of the believer because however much you do in fulfilment of your responsibilities, you will never repay what you owe to Allah you will never fulfil His due. That is why Allah makes it absolutely clear to us that although He has obliged us to work and strive it is not in any accumulation of good actions that our hopes of happiness lie; our joy should rather rest in our Lord's favour towards us. He says: *"Say: 'It is the favour and mercy of Allah that should be the cause of their rejoicing. That is better than anything they accumulate.'"* (10:58)

It is this bestowal of Divine favour that is the answer to those who ask how Thawban – or someone less than Thawban – can be in Paradise with the Prophets, the truly sincere, martyrs and the righteous. Preference is obtained by Allah's favour in granting a person obedience to Allah and His Messenger and love for Allah

and His Messenger. Their striving and action are a gift to them from Allah. That is why Allah's favour is the object of the joy of the believer. "*That is favour from Allah, and Allah is suffices as a Knower.*" We are pleased with and rejoice at the knowledge of Allah, because Allah arranges His judgements in a comprehensive and inclusive way and He recognises the sincerity of the love in the hearts of the believers for those who have a higher station than themselves.

Those who strive in the Way of Allah with their wealth and lives

The Almighty says:

"*So let those who sell* (yashruna) *the life of this world for the Next World fight in the Way of Allah. If someone fights in the Way of Allah, whether he is killed or is victorious, We will pay him an immense reward.*" (4:74)

The word for sell used here – *shara* – indicates mutual exchange. You say, "I bought this garment for a dirham," meaning you took the garment and gave a dirham in exchange for it. Thus it can mean either "buy" or "sell", because the buyer and the seller are similar in respect of the value of what they receive. People of old relied on barter, which was the mutual exchange of goods. No money changed hands. People gave grain in exchange for dates. The terms "buying" and "selling" came into existence when money started to be exchanged for goods. What is the difference between goods and money? Goods are direct provision and money is indirect provision. The buyer pays a sum of money which he cannot consume and takes goods which he can.

Allah Almighty says: "*So let those who sell the life of this world for the Next World fight in the Way of Allah.*" (4:84) Here the believer gives this world in order to receive the Next World, represented by Paradise, wherein lies his reward and the Station of the Martyrs. That is why Allah Almighty says in another *ayat*: "*Allah has bought from the believers their selves and their wealth in return for Paradise. They fight in the Way of Allah and they kill and are killed. It is a promise binding on Him in the Torah, the Gospel and the Qur'an – and who is truer to his contract than Allah? Rejoice, then, in the bargain you have made. That is the great victory.*" (9:111) That is the trade transaction which Allah Almighty makes with the believers.

We all know about profitable exchanges. Everyone likes the idea of giving something and getting something more in return. That is why the Almighty says in another *ayat*: "*They hope for a transaction which will not prove profitless.*" (35:29) When you want to make a contract, you compare what you are giving for what you are expecting to receive and make your decision on that basis. Is it worth parting with this in exchange for that? Allah Almighty describes our life in this world using the term *dunya*, a word implying that it is the lowest and basest dimension of existence, so the matter is made very clear. By exchanging this world for the Next World, what you will receive is certainly more than what you are giving up; the contract is definitely profitable.

Why does Allah admit a person into this transaction? Because before Allah Almighty offers you the contract, which gives you access to the transaction of fighting in the Way of Allah, it must be clear to you how you will obtain success in the Next World. You will not obtain this success by words only. Examine the project for the sake of which you are fighting. It is the basis of a society in which every man carries out the trust he was given. To protect that society, you must fulfil the trust you have been given and establish justice. To this end Allah has commanded us to worship one God and not to separate. Following on from this He has commanded us to be good to our parents and relatives, and to orphans and the poor. It is essential to uphold this project, which ensures the security of all.

So before imposing fighting on us, Allah made it clear that this is the nature of the society for which we will be fighting. And we must know that there is a time when we will have to go out to fight. The ultimate possible outcome of that is to be killed, in which case you receive the reward of the Next World. Allah Almighty says: "*So let those who sell the life of this world for the Next World fight in the Way of Allah. If someone fights in the Way of Allah, whether he is killed or is victorious, We will pay him an immense reward.*" (4:74) That is for fighting in the Way of Allah and elevating the banner of "There is no god but Allah." But Allah's words "*fight in the Way of Allah*" indicate that there is another type of fighting which is not in the Way of Allah. Someone may fight a

...out of anger or to show how brave he is. A man's fighting is always gauged according to his intention.

And, as we see, there are two possible outcomes for someone who is fighting in the Way of Allah, for the believers against the unbelievers: either he is killed by the enemy or he is victorious. He says to the unbelievers, "I am fighting to obtain one of the two best possible results: either I will be killed and become a martyr, who will have a better life than this, or I will defeat you. What are you unbelievers expecting to get?" The Messenger of Allah ﷺ saw those who had fought in the Way of Allah during his Night Journey and Ascension, and was shown their state. He ﷺ saw a group sowing and immediately reaping the harvest of the seeds they had sown. This is because someone who is killed in the Way of Allah does so purely to make the Word of Allah uppermost.

Allah's words "*We shall pay him an immense reward*" call our attention to the fact that every action inevitably accords with the power of the one who makes it. If a child hits someone, his blow is not going to be as strong as that of a full-grown man. If the person who gives you a reward is someone like you, that reward will be limited by his particular circumstances – but if the one who is giving the reward is our Lord, that reward will accord with His unlimited power and so it will inevitably be immense.

A reward is something given in recompense for a benefit received. There is a difference between a reward and a price paid. A price is an amount paid in simple exchange for something received. A reward is an amount given to someone when you benefit by something they have done for you. When I buy a thing, I pay an agreed price for it; but when I give a reward for something, I am paying someone an unfixed amount on account of a benefit I have received from them. So is what Allah gives to the person who is killed in the Way of Allah a reward or a price paid? Allah makes this abundantly clear. He tells us that He does not pay a fixed price for fighting in His Way. He looks at our actions and our striving and desire for martyrdom and gives us "an immense reward" in return.

The Almighty says: "...*delighting in the favour Allah has bestowed on them.*" (3:170) Equality is achieved between people in the sense that everyone will die, but the particular favour referred to here is

that Allah makes the martyrdom of those He loves a direct route to His pleasure and to bliss. And that is not all. On top of that we find that the brotherhood of faith remains a reality for them, so that it is not just the prerogative of those who remain alive in this world but rather extends beyond it. True faith demands that a believer desire for his brother what he desires for himself. The martyrs are alive with their Lord, enjoying a life which contains provision, sensation and great joy. That is why they rejoice over their brother believers who have not yet arrived, saying, "If only they could come and see what we see!" Allah tells us that they are "*rejoicing over those they left behind who have not yet joined them.*" (3:170), and this means that those who remain in this world are destined to join them later. The martyrs say, "They are going to arrive, but we just wish they could be with us now to taste the bliss and the good which we are now experiencing." They are fulfilling the words of the Messenger ﷺ, "The faith of none of you is complete until he desires for his brother what he desires for himself." (al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Ibn 'Abbas ﷺ reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "When your brothers were struck down in the Battle of Uhud, Allah put their spirits into the mouths of green birds which go to the rivers of Paradise and eat of its fruit. They retire to gold lamps in the shade of the Throne. When they find their fine food and drink and the favour they have been granted, they say, 'If only our brothers knew what Allah has done with us so that they would strive in *jihad* and not shrink from war!' Allah Almighty then says, 'I will convey it to them from you.' So Allah revealed these *ayats*: '*Do not suppose that those killed in the Way of Allah are dead. No indeed! They are alive and well provided for in the very presence of their Lord.*' (3:169)" (Ahmad)

The guardians of orphans and those who strive on behalf of widows and the poor

Al-Bukhari and Muslim transmit from Abu Hurayra ﷺ that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "I and those who care for orphans will be in Paradise like this," and he pointed with his forefinger and middle finger together. Ibn Hajar says in *al-Fath* (12/49): "Our shaykh said in his commentary on at-Tirmidhi: 'The wisdom inherent in this gesture lies in either making them the same with respect to their entry into Paradise, or with respect to their close proximity to the Prophet in Paradise, or it may be a reference to the role of the Prophet, in that he was sent to a people who did not understand the matter of their *deen* and so he acted as their guardian as well as their teacher and guide.'"

Al-Bukhari and Muslim transmit from Abu Hurayra ﷺ that the Messenger of Allah said, "Someone who strives on behalf of widows and the poor is the same as someone who strives in the way of Allah or who prays during the night and fasts during the day." An-Nawawi says, commenting on these words of the Prophet ﷺ: "What is meant by the word 'strive' here is providing for them and working to support them. The word 'widow' in this context means simply women who do not have a husband, although it is also said that it is confined to women whose husbands have died." Ibn Qutayba says: "They are called widows (*armala*) because of the *irmal* they suffer; in other words, the destitution and lack of provision they suffer owing to their lack of a husband. A man is called *armal* when his provision runs out. When the Prophet ﷺ, refers to guardians of orphans he means those who undertake their maintenance, clothing, discipline, teaching and other things. That distinction is achieved by both those who take on that responsibility through the use of their own wealth and those who use the orphan's wealth through their legal guardianship."

The words of the People of Paradise when they enter Paradise

The people of Paradise praise Allah Almighty for guiding them to faith and Islam and for making it easy for them to follow the obligations and the Path which that entailed. The first words they say when they see the favour that Allah Almighty has bestowed upon them are: "*Praise be to Allah who has guided us to this! We could not have been guided had Allah had not guided us.*" (7:43) We say "Praise be to Allah" in this world in order to thank Allah for His blessings; we will say it in the Next World because our gratitude will be even greater because things will appear in front of us simply by being thought of and because the blessings of Allah are beyond counting or calculation. "Praise be to Allah for revealing to us the Path which enabled us to attain to this bliss and opening up to us the path of faith. Praise be to Allah who sent His Messengers to guide us to the Path."

The greeting of the People of Paradise

Allah Almighty says: "*Their call there is 'Glory be You, O Allah!' Their greeting there is: 'Peace!' The end of their call is 'Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.'*" (10:10) Their call is a kind of supplication. Although the Next World is not the realm of responsibility where worship of Allah is an individual obligation, as it is in this world, gratitude is nevertheless due to the Bestower of blessing. Their words, "*Glory be to You, O Allah*," are an acknowledgement of the blessings they receive. When you see something which delights you, you say, "Glory be to You, O Lord!" And when things come suddenly which are unexpected and are very beautiful, you say, "Praise be to Allah!" So you receive the blessing with the words "Glory be to Allah" and live with the blessing with the words "Praise be to Allah". That is why the Almighty says: "*The end of their supplication is: 'Praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds.'*" However the thing that gives life meaning and nourishment and continuity is for human beings at peace.

The meaning of peace is being content and pleased and having no conflict or disturbance with respect to other people. That can only happen when there is no internal conflict, no clash between the different elements which make up the human self. So a person's peace is first and foremost realised within himself. Then a human being is at peace with his family, which is the second line; then with his own people; and finally with the whole world. That is overall peace. There is no disturbance within himself or with his family or his people or the world. Whenever the area of peace expands, the feeling of the person of being at peace increases.

When Allah says: "*Their greeting there is 'Peace'*" (14:23), that peace manifests in various ways. Allah says in another *ayat*: "*The Companions of Paradise are busy enjoying themselves today, they and their wives reclining on couches in the shade. They shall have fruits there and whatever they request. 'Peace!' A word from a merciful Lord.*" (36:55-58) This is the peace which has ultimate meaning – peace from Allah. Allah does not say that this is peace which you inherit from Him on account of being a peaceful and pleasing soul. It is

peace by a direct word from Allah. What happiness there is for someone addressed directly by Allah without any intermediary, yet in a language they can understand! There is a difference between Allah sending peace to you and greeting you with peace. This is what is inherent in His words: "*Peace! A word from a Merciful Lord.*" (36:58) This is the greeting of Allah, and then after this station comes the greeting of the angels: "*Angels will enter in to welcome them from every gate: 'Peace be upon you.'*" (13:23-24)

In Allah's words "*Their greeting there is 'Peace'*" (14:23), we find in the word "peace" an indication of pleasure and of continual existence in Paradise. Peace is the feeling you most love to have in yourself. If everyone is against you and you pause and ask yourself, "What have I done to turn people against me?" and you answer yourself, "I only did it for the good," you feel peace in yourself. Then, in spite of the fact that others are not happy with what you have done, life is still easy for you and you are free from any feeling of enmity or rancour.

This is borne out by something that happened in the time of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He once said to a group of his Companions: "A man will come to you now who is one of the people of Paradise." Someone they knew came up to them and when he left, one of the Companions got up and went after him to find out what he had done to merit that distinction. He spent the night with him in order to discover what it was, so that he could strive to be like him. He found that the man went to sleep after *'Isha'*, and did not pray during the night or recite or do anything special, except that when he turned over in his bed he remembered Allah and praised Him. In the morning he asked him, "What is it that you do which made the Messenger ﷺ give you the good news of Paradise?" The man said, "I pray as you pray and I fast as you fast and I pay *zakat* as you do; but I spend the night with no rancour in my heart towards any Muslims."

The exact text of the hadith concerned is as follows. Ahmad relates in his *Musnad* from Anas ibn Malik ﷺ who said, "Once we were sitting with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, when he said, 'A man who is of the people of Paradise will come to you now.' A man of the *Ansar* appeared. His beard was dripping from *wudu'* and his sandals were hanging from his left hand. On the following day, the

Prophet ﷺ said the same thing again and that man appeared as he had done the first time. On the third day the Prophet ﷺ once more said the same thing and again the same man appeared as he had done on the first two days. When the Prophet ﷺ got up, 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'As followed the man, and said that he would spend three nights with him to find out about what it was about him."

Anas continued, "'Abdullah said that he spent those three nights and did not see him rise in the night at all to pray. All he did was turn in his bed and mention Allah Almighty and say the *takbir* until he got up for the *Fajr* prayer. He said, 'After the third night, it seemed to me that his actions did not amount to very much and so I said, "Slave of Allah, there is no anger or shunning between me and my father (he had given that as an excuse for coming to stay with him). I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say about you three times, 'A man who is one of the people of Paradise will come to you now.' On each occasion it was you who came, and I wanted to go to you to see what you did so that I could imitate it. But I have not seen you perform very many actions. What is it that has made you reach the high degree that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ referred to?" He said, "There is nothing except what you have seen." When I turned to go, he called me and said, "There is nothing except what you have seen, except that I do not find in myself any bad feeling towards any Muslim and I do not envy anyone for any good which Allah has given him."' 'Abdullah said, 'This is what I have heard of you – and we are not capable of emulating it.'"

That is individual peace, and when someone achieves this kind of peace he has no fear of this world or anything in it. He is at peace with himself, with his family, with his environment and with his society, so Allah gives him peace from Himself.

The womenfolk of the People of Paradise

Allah Almighty says:

"They will have there spouses of perfect purity and they will remain there timelessly, for ever." (2:25)

A wife can be the source of great pleasure for a man in this world, if she is righteous; but if she is not righteous she can make his life extremely unpleasant. In this world there are many things a woman can do to make her husband's life wretched, such as not listening to him, or flaying him with a sharp tongue, or constantly arguing with him, or having no concern for him, or trying to provoke him into doubting her, and other such things. In the Next World, however, all these unpleasant things are eliminated by the command of Allah Almighty. In the Next World a man's wife is purified of all those things that her husband disliked in her; anything he did not love in this world disappears.

In the Next World believers are purified of all the imperfections and flaws of this world. The first of them is malice and rancour. As the Almighty tells us: *"We will strip away any rancour in their hearts – brothers, resting on couches face-to-face."* (15:47) So the criteria of this world will no longer apply in the Next World and you will not find there anything you disliked in this world. Anything you found unpleasant in this world will disappear in the Next World. Allah Almighty uses the example of a wife because she is something that can make life in this world either infernal or delightful.

Purified wives are what is promised by Allah to the believers. It is known that in this world things happen to a woman which may make her offensive, either physically or characterwise. For instance, there is a time during which a man is not permitted to approach his wife, and she may have some bad characteristic that detracts from her physical beauty. So a man may be deceived by a woman's outward appearance. He may fall in love with a woman

and then find in her a quality which he dislikes. It is very different in the Next World. There there are "purified wives", meaning that they are purified of every defect which affects the women of this world. And who are they purified by? It is Allah Almighty who purifies them, both physically and in respect of their character. In this world a man desires a woman for her youthful radiance, which continues to attract him as long as it lasts. In time, however, wrinkles and corpulence appear and mutual aversion becomes the result. But in the Next World, women are purified of every detrimental quality and their youthful radiance and beauty endure forever.

Dark-eyed Houris

Anas ibn Malik ﷺ related that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "An evening or morning spent in the way of Allah is better than the whole of this world and everything in it. In Paradise, the amount of ground covered by one of your bows or whips is better than this world and everything in it. And if one of the women of Paradise (*hur*) were to appear to the people of the earth, she would illuminate everything between the heaven and the earth and fill it with fragrance. The scarf on her head alone is better than this world and everything in it." (*al-Bukhari*)

Ibn al-Qayyim said: *Hur* is the plural of *hawra'*, which means a beautiful young pale-skinned woman with very dark eyes. It is clear that the word *hur* is derived from *hawar*, a word referring to the intense whiteness of the eye when contrasted with an intense blackness in the same eye – thus indicating both, as *as-Sihah* confirms. A woman who is *hawra'* is one who has this marked contrast in her eyes. One of the marks of beauty in a woman is that her eyes are big; small eyes are considered a blemish. Whiteness is thought beautiful in three places: skin colour, teeth and eyes. Blackness is liked in four places: eyes, eyebrows, eyelashes and hair.

Abu Hurayra ﷺ reported that the Prophet ﷺ said, "The first group to enter Paradise will do so looking like the full moon and then those who follow them will look like a bright planet in the sky. All of them will have two wives, each so beautiful that the marrow of her thighs will be able to be seen through the flesh. There will be no bachelors in Paradise." (al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Abu Hurayra ﷺ also reported that the Prophet ﷺ said, "A man in Paradise will have two wives from the houris, who will be wearing seventy robes, and yet the marrow of their thighs will be visible through the garments." (Ahmad)

Abu Sa'id al-Khudri ﷺ reported that the Prophet ﷺ said about the words of the Almighty *"like precious gems of ruby and pearl"* (55:58) that a man will see his face in her cheek, clearer than a

mirror, that the least of her pearls would illuminate everything between the East and the West and that she will wear seventy garments through which the eye can see the marrow of her leg.

People will be led to Paradise in chains

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Our Lord Almighty marvels at a person who is led to Paradise in chains." (Abu Dawud) In answer to the question of how someone can be led to Paradise in spite of himself, we reply that this hadith embraces a number of groups who were brought to Islam by force and then tasted the sweetness of faith and continued on the Way to the end of their lives. The first of those to whom this applied were unbelievers or non-Muslims who became prisoners of war. They were captured in battle and led unwillingly in chains to prison camps. While in these camps, they had the opportunity of looking into what faith really involved, away from any other influence. They sat down to reflect, debate and listen. They became convinced by that process and came to believe in the *deen*. Faith attracted them and they studied Islam and so they increased in faith, reformed their actions and became people of Paradise. For those people, being led in chains was the beginning of their turning to faith and the beginning of their Way to Paradise. It is almost as if, had it not been for the chains which were placed on their hands and feet, they would not have turned to faith and become people of Paradise.

A second group to whom this noble hadith applies are all those people who have been somehow compelled to go to gatherings of knowledge and *dhikr*. An example of that might be a blind man who has a son. The man wants to go to the mosque to pray and listen to religious teaching and he takes his son with him to guide him there and back. The son has to go with his father, even though he may not particularly want to do so. In other words, he goes in spite of himself and has to stay there for some time. Then those religious gatherings start to attract the boy to the *deen* and he feels that he wants to learn more, and so he reads and follows the Path and increases in faith. So in the beginning he was led to Paradise in spite of himself; it is as if he was being led in chains. Then after that he took the Path and sincerely wanted to obey Allah. Anyone, therefore, who starts on the Way to Allah reluc-

tantly and then his heart is guided by Allah to faith is one of those who are led to Paradise in chains.

If someone were to ask whether it is possible for a person to enter Paradise without doing any good actions, we would say that there are certainly some who will do so. Let us suppose that someone testifies that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, doing so sincerely out of true faith in which there is no showing-off or hypocrisy. Then immediately after that he drops down dead or is hit by a car, or a rock falls on his head, killing him. He will enter Paradise because testifying that there is no god but Allah cancels out everything that happened before it. Mukhayriq was a Jewish rabbi and then Allah guided him and he proclaimed the *shahada* and announced his faith. Before he entered the battle at Uhud, he said, "Give my property to Muhammad." He was martyred without having prayed a single *rak'a*, but before he died he had sincerely articulated the *shahada*. When the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was told what had happened, he said, "Mukhayriq is an excellent Jew" – even though he had not prayed a single *rak'a*. He entered Paradise by his faith.

It is said that the proportion of people of Paradise to the people of Hell will be one to a thousand according to a *hadith qudsi* which says: "Allah Almighty will say on the Day of Rising, 'Adam!' He will say, 'At Your service!' A voice will call, 'Allah commands you to take a group of your descendants to the Fire.' Adam will ask, 'What is the delegation of the Fire?' He will be told, 'Nine hundred and ninety-nine out of of every thousand.'"

According to a version in al-Bukhari and Muslim from Abu Sa'id ﷺ the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Allah Almighty will say, 'Adam!' He will answer, 'At Your service. Good is in Your hand!' He will say, 'Bring out the people who merit Hell.' He will ask, 'How many are those who merit Hell?' He will say, 'Nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand.' At that time children will become white-haired and every pregnant female will abort her foetus (unformed), and *"you will see mankind as in a drunken riot, yet not drunk, but dreadful will be the punishment of Allah."* (22:2)'" He continued, "That was hard for them to hear and they said, 'Messenger of Allah, which of us is that one?' He said, 'Rejoice, there are one thousand from Ya'juj and Ma'juj for every man from

among you.' Then he said, 'By the One who has my soul in His hand, I hope that you will be a third of the people of Paradise.' We praised Allah and said, 'Allah is greater!' He said, 'By the One who has my soul in His hand, I hope that you will be half of the people of Paradise. Among mankind you are only like a white hair on the hide of a black ox or like a branding mark on the foreleg of a donkey.'"

The Vision of Allah Almighty in Paradise

Allah Almighty says: *"Faces on that day will be radiant, gazing at their Lord."* (75: 22-23) In Paradise the believers will not be able to do otherwise than delight in the Next World, because when its blessings arrive their rejoicing will be automatic. But that is not the end of the story. It goes beyond that to the point that you will experience the fulfilment of your most ultimate desire when you achieve the vision of the Bestower of all blessings. All believers who enter Paradise find all that they desire. Indeed they do not desire anything without it coming to them immediately, and so they enjoy endlessly the endless gifts of Allah and His absolute power to give them everything they desire.

Some of the believers, however, look beyond the fruits of Paradise and the absolute bliss it contains and are occupied with seeking the vision of their Almighty Lord. The part of Paradise inhabited by such believers is called 'Illiyun. 'Illiyun does not contain any of those wondrous things you have heard of about Paradise. There is nothing there but the meeting with Allah. Provision and blessings in that place are beyond even the endless delights of life in Paradise. Human beings there will forever bathe in the eternal favour and measureless immensity of Allah Almighty. They will experience the ineffable majesty and supreme sublimity of delight stemming directly from their Lord.

That delight is greater than anything else in existence. Allah tells us about immeasurable delights which exist in the Gardens of the Next World; and then He tells us of something else which is greater than all of them. He tells us that His greatest gift is in the guarantee He gives us that believers will have access to the direct vision of their Lord. That is what Allah is referring to in His words, *"Faces will be radiant on that day, gazing at their Lord."* (75:22-23) Regarding this, Ibn al-Qayyim says in his book, *Hadi al-arwah* in the chapter entitled "Seeing their Lord Almighty with their eyes openly as the moon is seen on the night of the full moon and He will be smiling at them":

This chapter is the noblest chapter in the book and the most esteemed, most important and pleasing to the People of the *Sunna* and Community and most telling against the people of innovation and misguidance. It is the final destination to which those who are gathered will be gathered, for which the strivers strive, the racers race, and the workers work. When the people of Paradise attain it, they forget every other delight they have been given. Being deprived of it and veiled from it is worse for the people of Hell than the punishment of Hellfire itself. The Prophets and Messengers are in agreement about it, as are all the Companions, the *Tabi'un* and Imams of Islam throughout all the generations of Islam. The renegades of the followers of innovation deny it, as do the foolish Jahmites, the esotericists, who are outside all religions, and also the Rafidites, who hold fast to the rope of Shaytan, are cut off from the rope of Allah, and devote themselves to abusing the Companions of the Messenger of Allah and fighting the *Sunna* and its people. Each of those is the enemy of Allah and His Messenger and His *deen*. Each of them is veiled from their Lord and driven away from His door. Numerous proofs are adduced by the rightly-guided scholars of Islam to show that the vision of Allah is possible.

First proof. Allah Almighty reported that the man with most knowledge of such matters in his time, the one He spoke to, His intimate and pure friend on the earth, Musa, asked his Lord to let him look at Him. But his Almighty Lord told him: "'*You will not see Me, but look at the mountain. If it remains firm in its place, you will see Me.' But when His Lord manifested Himself to the mountain, He crushed it flat.*'" (7:143)

There are several aspects to the evidence for the possibility of seeing Allah arising from this *ayat*. The first is that it is not conceivable that the one who spoke to the All-Merciful and was His noble Messenger would ask his

Lord for something that was not a possibility for Him. In fact, on the contrary, such a thing is unthinkable.

The second is that Allah Almighty did not object to him asking it. If it had been impossible, He would have objected to it. In the same vein, when Ibrahim the Friend asked his Almighty Lord to show him how He brings the dead to life, He did not object to it either. Nor did He object to the request of 'Isa ibn Maryam when he asked his Lord to send down a table from heaven. Yet when Nuh asked Allah to save his son, He objected to the request and said, "'*I admonish you lest you should be among the ignorant.' He said, 'My Lord, I seek refuge with You from asking You for anything about which I have no knowledge. If You do not forgive me and have mercy on me, I will be among the lost.*'" (11:46-47) This shows that when one of the Messengers asked for something impossible Allah made it clear to them.

The third aspect is that He answered with the words:"*You will not see Me*." He did not say, "You cannot see Me" or "I am not visible" or "It is not permitted to see Me." The difference between the two answers is clear to anyone who reflects. This indicates that the Almighty can be seen, but that Musa did not have sufficient strength to withstand the vision of Him in this world because the human frame is simply incapable of bearing it.

The fourth is Allah's words, "*But look at the mountain. If it remains firm in its place, you will see Me*." In saying this Allah is informing Musa that the mountain, in spite of its immense strength and firmness, will not be able to withstand His disclosure to it in this abode of the direct vision of Himself, so how much more this must be so in the case of a frail human being, who is created weak!

The fifth aspect is found in the words of the Almighty: "*But when His Lord manifested Himself to the mountain, He crushed it flat*." This is one of the clearest proofs of the possibility of seeing Allah. If it is possible for Allah to be manifested to the mountain, which is something inanimate and not subject to reward or punishment, how can it

be denied that He is able to appear to His Prophets, Messengers and friends in the Abode of Honour and allow them to see Him.

The sixth aspect is that Allah Almighty spoke directly to Musa, addressing him, conversing intimately with him, and summoning him. If it is possible for someone to hear Allah addressing His speech directly to him without any intermediary, it is clear that seeing Him is even more likely to be permissible. Denial of the possibility of direct vision of Allah necessarily entails denial of the possibility of direct speech with Him. The groups referred to above deny both these things: they deny that Allah spoke to anyone or that anyone can see Him. But Musa asked to see Him after he had heard His speech, knowing that because of His addressing him and speaking to him it must also be possible to see Him. Allah did not tell him that such a thing was impossible for Him, but, instead showed him that he would not be able to bear it.

Second proof. This is found in Allah's words "*Have* taqwa *of Allah and know that you are going to meet Him*" (2:223); "*Their greeting on the Day they meet Him will be 'Peace'*" (33:44); and "*Let him who hopes to meet his Lord...*" (18:110); and "*Those who were sure that they were going to meet Allah.*" (2:249) The philologists agree that the word "meet", when used about a subject who is not blind and free from any other impediment, necessarily implies direct vision of the object met. This is not contradicted by Allah's words "*He has punished them by putting hypocrisy in their hearts until the day they meet Him.*" (9:77) Sound explicit hadiths indicate that the hypocrites will see Allah on the Day of Resurrection, as indeed will the unbelievers, as is related in both *Sahih* collections in the hadith about Allah's manifestation on that Day.

The people of the *Sunna* hold three positions regarding this matter: firstly, that only the believers will see Him; secondly that at the Resurrection everyone will see Him, both believers and unbelievers, and then He will be veiled

from the unbelievers and they will not see Him after that; and thirdly that the hypocrites will see Him, but the unbelievers will not. All three positions can be found in the school of Ahmad and that of his adherents.

Third proof. This is found in the words of the Almighty: "*Allah calls to the Abode of Peace and He guides whom He wills to a straight path. Those who do good will have the best and more. Neither dust nor debasement will darken their faces. They are the Companions of Paradise, remaining in it timelessly, for ever.*" (10:25-26) In this passage the word "best" refers to Paradise and the word "more" refers to the vision of Allah's Noble Face. That is how the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, to whom the Qur'an was revealed, explained it and so the Companions followed him in conveying this interpretation. Muslim related in his *Sahih* from a hadith from Suhayb ؓ that the Prophet ﷺ said: "When the people of Paradise enter Paradise, Allah Almighty will say, 'Do you desire that I add anything else to what you have?' They will say, 'Are our faces not shining white? Have You not admitted us to Paradise and saved us from Hellfire?' Then He will lift the veil and they could not be given anything they love more than the joy of looking at their Lord." (Muslim)

Abu Bakr as-Siddiq ؓ said of the words "*Those who do good will have the best and more*" that the word "more" refers to looking at the Face of their Lord Almighty. Ibn 'Abbas ؓ and Ibn Mas'ud ؓ said of the words, "*Those who do good will have the best and more! Neither dust nor debasement will darken their faces*" that "the best" is Paradise and "more" is looking at the Face of Allah. 'Abd ar-Rahman ibn Abi Layla, 'Amir ibn Sa'id, Isma'il ibn 'Abd ar-Rahman as-Suddi, ad-Dahhak ibn Muzaham, 'Abd ar-Rahman ibn Sabit, Abu Ishaq as-Subay'i, Qatada, Sa'id ibn al-Musayyab, al-Hasan al-Basri, 'Ikrima, the *mawla* of Ibn 'Abbas, and Mujahid ibn Jabr all said that "the best" is Paradise and "more" is looking at the Face of Allah Almighty. And more than one of the early generations

said in sound *hadiths* about the *ayat* "Neither dust nor debasement will darken their faces", that it means after having looked at Allah.

Fourth proof. This is taken from the words of Allah: *"No indeed! Rather that Day they shall be veiled from their Lord."* (83:15). It is clear from this ayat that Allah Almighty made the fact that the unbelievers are veiled from seeing Him and hearing His speech one of the greatest of their punishments. If the believers were not able to see Him or hear His words, they would also be condemned in the same way, so the *ayat* shows that it must be the case that they are able to see and hear Him. Ash-Shafi'i himself and other imams used this as a proof. At-Tabarani and others mentioned that al-Muzani said that he heard ash-Shafi'i say about these words of the Almighty: *"No indeed! Rather that Day they shall be veiled from their Lord"*: "The fact that these people are veiled because of Divine anger at them is evidence that His friends will see Him as a result of Divine contentment with them."

Fifth proof. This is found in the words of the Almighty: *"They shall have there everything they want, and with Us there is still more."* (50:35) According to at-Tabarani, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib ﷺ and Anas ibn Malik ﷺ said that the words "still more" meant looking at the Face of Allah Almighty. Among the *Tabi'un*, Zayd ibn Wahb and others also said the same.

Sixth proof. This is in the words of Allah Almighty: *"Eyesight cannot perceive Him but He perceives eyesight."* Finding a proof in this is remarkable, since it is also used by those who deny the possibility of seeing Allah. Our shaykh confirmed its applicability in the best and most subtle way, and he told me: "I maintain that no invalidator uses an *ayat* or sound hadith as evidence for his falsehood without that in reality proving the opposite of his posi-

tion." An example of that is this *ayat*, which in fact is a stronger argument for the possibility of the vision of Allah than it is for the opposite. Allah Almighty mentions this in a praiseworthy context. It is known that praise normally accompanies firmly established attributes. The non-existence of something is not an imperfection and is not generally praised. Allah only praises the non-existence of something when it implies the existence of something else which is praiseworthy, like His praise of lack of sleep which implies the good quality of staying up to pray.

Thus the negation of death with respect to Him is praiseworthy in that it implies the perfection of His life; the negation of a partner, companion, child or helper implies the perfection of His lordship, divinity and power; the negation of eating and drinking with regard to Him implies the perfection of His eternal everlastingness and independence; the negation of intercession with Him without His permission implies the perfection of His unicity and lack of need of His creation; the negation of any injustice on His part implies the perfection of His justice, knowledge and wealth; the negation of any kind of forgetfulness on His part, or of something slipping from his knowledge, implies the perfection of His knowledge and its encompassment of all things; and the negation of any likeness to Himself implies the absolute perfection of His Essence and Attributes. He does not praise the non-existence of anything which does not imply a confirmed positive opposite it.

If what was meant by His words "*Eyesight cannot perceive Him*" was that it was not possible to see Him in any way, there would have been nothing praiseworthy in that and no implication of a positive opposite to it. The truth is that His words "*Eyesight cannot perceive Him*" indicate the extent of His immensity and that He is greater than all things – and that such is His immensity that it is impossible to perceive Him in His totality, since perception of a thing implies encompassing it completely. Perception means encompassing something in vision and

is more than just seeing it. So seeing and complete perception can exist together or independently of one another. The Almighty Lord can be seen and yet not perceived completely, just as He can be known yet not encompassed by knowledge.

This is what was understood by the Companions and Imams about that *ayat*. Ibn 'Abbas ﷺ said that *"Eyesight cannot perceive Him"* means that eyesight cannot encompass Him completely. Qatada said that Allah is too great to be totally perceived by eyesight. 'Atiyya said, "They look at Allah but their eyes cannot encompass Him, owing to His immensity, while His sight does encompass them. That is the meaning of the words of the Almighty, *"Eyesight cannot perceive Him but He perceives eyesight."* (6:103) So the believers will see their Almighty Lord with their eyes but not with all their sight, meaning that they do not encompass Him, since it is not permitted for Allah to be described as being encompassed by anything, because He encompasses everything. In the same way, people know those things He informs them of but they do not encompass His knowledge."

Seventh proof. This is found in the words of the Almighty: *"Faces on that Day will be radiant, gazing at their Lord."* (75:22-23) Provided that you do not misinterpret this *ayat* and distort its straightforward meaning, thereby denying what the One who spoke them meant by them, you find that it clearly states that Allah will be seen with the eyes on the Day of Rising. If you insist on distorting it, in the way which those who do so call "interpretation", then such a distortion of the texts referring to the Hereafter, Paradise, Hellfire, the Balance, and the Reckoning is easier on those who do it than than to accept of their true meaning. The same is true for the interpretation of every text which the Qur'an and *Sunna* contains. If someone wants to misinterpret texts by distorting them outside their proper context, it is always possible to find a way of doing so, but those who do so corrupt both the

dun and this world. In this *ayat* it is clear that the "gazing" referred to is directly connected to "faces": in other words, to the eyes of those concerned. The particle *"ila"* (towards) makes it explicitly a matter of the vision of the eye. The grammatical construction shows that what is meant is looking with the eyes at Allah Almighty – Exalted is He.

The verb "gazing" is transitive and has a number of usages. When used with the preposition *ila*, it means looking with the eyes, as in Allah's words: *"Look at their fruits when they bear fruit."* (6:99) That is even more the case when applied to the face which is the place where vision takes place. Ibn 'Abbas said, "'Gazing at their Lord'" means 'looking at the face of their Lord'." 'Ikrima said about this *ayat*: "'*Faces on that Day will be radiant*' from bliss, '*gazing at their Lord*,' looking directly at their Lord." Then he related that Ibn 'Abbas ﷺ had said the same thing. This is the position of every commentator from the people of the *Sunna* and hadith.

Abu Hurayra ﷺ said, "Some people asked, 'Messenger of Allah, will we see our Lord on the Day of Rising?' The Prophet ﷺ said, 'Do you have any argument about seeing the moon on the night of the full moon?' 'No, Messenger of Allah,' they answered. He asked, 'Do you have any argument about seeing the sun when there are no clouds?' 'No, Messenger of Allah,' they answered. He said, 'You will see Him like that. On the Day of Rising He will gather people and say: "Whoever worshipped anything should follow it." Those who worshipped the sun will follow the sun, those who worshipped the moon will follow the moon, and those who worshipped idols will follow the idols. Then there will remain this community, along with its hypocrites. Then Allah will come to them in a form other than one which they recognise and say, "I am your Lord." They will say, "We seek refuge with Allah from you. This where we stay until our Lord comes to us. When our Lord comes to us, we will recognise Him." Then Allah will come to them again in a form which they

recognise and say, "I am your Lord." They will say, "You are indeed our Lord," and they will follow Him.

'A bridge will be set up over Hell. I and my community will be the first to cross it. No one will speak that day except for the Messengers, and the prayer on that day will be, "O Allah, preserve us! Preserve us!" In Hell there will be hooks like the thorns of the prickly-plant. Have you seen the prickly-plant?' They answered, 'Yes, Messenger of Allah.' He said, 'They are like the thorns of the prickly-plant except that only Allah knows how enormous they are. They will hook onto people according to their actions. Some of the believers will remain caught up because of their actions; others will cross and be saved until the time when Allah has finished judging between His slaves and wishes, by His mercy, to bring out of Hellfire whomever He wills. He will command the angels to take out of Hell those who did not associate anything with Allah, from among those who testified that there was no god but Allah to whom He wishes to show mercy. They will recognise them in Hellfire by their marks of prostration. The Fire will consume every part of the Children of Adam except for the mark of prostration, for Allah has forbidden Hellfire to consume the mark of prostration. Those people will emerge from Hell burned and blackened; but the Water of Life will be poured over them and they will grow as a seed grows on the bank of a stream.

'Then Allah will finish judging between His slaves and only one man will be left, whose face will be turned towards Hell. He will be the last of the people of Paradise to enter Paradise. He will say, "O Lord, turn my face away from Hellfire! Its wind has harmed me and its flames have burned me." He will make whatever supplication Allah wishes him to make. Then Allah will say, "If that is granted to you, will you not ask for something else?" He will say, "No, I will not ask for anything else!" and he will give

Allah whatever pledges and promises He asks for and so Allah will turn his face away from the Fire.

'When Allah turns him to face Paradise and he sees it, he will be silent as long as Allah wills him to be silent. Then he will say, "O Lord, bring me to the gate of Paradise!" Allah will say, "Did you not give me pledges and promises that you would not ever ask for anything other than what you were given? Woe to you, son of Adam! How treacherous you are!" He will say, "O Lord!" and will pray to Allah until He says, "If that is granted to you, will you not ask for something else?" He will say, "No, by Your might!" So he will give his Lord whatever pledges and promises He asks for – and Allah will bring him right up to the gate of Paradise.

'When he reaches the gate of Paradise and Paradise is opened to him, and he sees the joy and happiness it contains, he will be silent for as long as Allah wishes him to be silent. Then he will say, "O Lord, let me enter Paradise!" Allah will say, "Did you not give Me your pledges and promises that you would not ask for anything other than what you were given? Woe to you, son of Adam! How treacherous you are!" The man will say, "O Lord, do not make me the most wretched of Your creation!" He will continue to pray until Allah laughs at him. When He laughs at him, He will say, "Enter Paradise." When he enters it, Allah will say to him, "Wish." He will ask His lord and wish until Allah reminds him to say, "Such-and-such and such-and-such as well," until all his wishes are finished. Allah will say, "You may have that, and the same again."'"

Abu Sa'id ﷺ said, "And ten times the like of it as well, Abu Hurayra." Abu Hurayra ﷺ said, "I only recall him saying, 'You can have that and the same again.'" Abu Sa'id said, "I testify that I memorised from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ the words, 'You can have that and ten times the like of it as well.'" Abu Hurayra ﷺ said, "That will be the last man of the people of Paradise to enter Paradise." (al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Abu Sa'id al-Khudri ﷺ said, "Some people in the time of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ asked, 'Messenger of Allah, will we see our Lord on the Day of Rising?' The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'Yes. Do you argue about seeing the sun when there are no clouds? Do you argue about seeing the moon on the night of the full moon?' 'No, Messenger of Allah,' they answered. 'You will not argue about seeing Allah, the Mighty and Exalted, on the Day of Rising any more than you argue about seeing either of them. On the Day of Rising, an announcer will make a proclamation: "Let every community follow what they used to worship. None of those who worshipped other than Allah in the form of idols and figures will remain. All of them will fall into Hell, until the only ones left are those who worshipped Allah, pious or impious, and the remnants of the People of the Book. The Jews will be summoned and they will be asked, "What did you worship?" They will say, "We used to worship 'Uzayr, the son of God." They will be told, "You lie. Allah does not have any wife or son. What are you seeking?" They will say, "We are thirsty, our Lord, so let us drink." An indication will be made, "Will you not be taken to drink?" and they will be gathered to Hellfire, which will be like a mirage whose parts are consuming one another. They will fall into the Fire. Then the Christians will be summoned and they will be asked, "What did you worship?" They will say, "We used to worship the Messiah, the son of God." They will be told, "You lie. Allah does not have any wife or son. What are you seeking?" They will say, "We are thirsty, our Lord, so let us drink." An indication will be made, "Will you not be taken to drink?" and they will be gathered to Hellfire, which will be like a mirage whose parts are consuming one another. They will fall into the Fire.

'This will happen as described before until the only ones left are those who worshipped Allah, pious or impious. The Lord of the Worlds will come to them in the

form closest to the form in which they thought of Him and they will be asked, "What are you waiting for? Every community has followed what they used to worship." They will say, "We separated ourselves from people in the world in spite of our great need of them, and we did not go along them. We are waiting for our Lord whom we used to worship. He will say, "I am your Lord." They will say twice or three times, "We seek refuge with Allah from you! We will not associate anything with Allah" until some of them are on the verge of going back on themselves.

'He will say, "Is there some sign between you and Him which will enable you to recognise Him?" They will answer, "Yes." The matter will be disclosed and all who prostrated to Allah of their own volition will be given permission by Allah to prostrate. But all who prostrated out of fear or to show off will have their backs rigidified by Allah, and every time they try to prostrate they will fall on their backs. Then they will raise their heads and He will have changed from the form they saw Him at first and He will say, "I am your Lord." They will say, "You are our Lord." Then the Bridge will be set up over Hell and intercession allowed. They will say, "O Allah, save us! Save us!!"'"

"Someone asked, 'Messenger of Allah, what is the Bridge?' He said, 'A slippery surface on which there are snares and hooks, and hard, wide thorns, like the curved thorns called *sa'dan* which are found in the Najd. Some of the believers will cross it in the blink of an eye, some like a flash of lightning, some like the wind, and some like a fast horse or camel. Some will be saved unhurt, some will have scratches, and some will fall into the fire of Hell until the time all believers are rescued from it. By the One who has my soul in His hand, none of you will more earnest in entreating Allah for anything than the believers will be in entreating Allah on the Day of Rising for their brothers who are in the Fire.

They will say, "Our Lord, they used to fast and pray and perform *hajj* with us." They will be told, "Bring out of Hell those you recognise. The Fire is forbidden to consume their forms." Many people will emerge when the Fire has reached their knees and the middle of their thighs. Then they will say, "Our Lord, none of those You commanded us to bring out are left in it." He will say, "Go back and bring out anyone you find who has a dinar's weight of faith in his heart." They will bring out many people and then say, "Our Lord, none of those You commanded us to bring out are left in it." Then He will say, "Go back and bring out whoever you find who has half a dinar's weight of faith in his heart." They will again bring out many people. Then they will say, "Our Lord, none of those You commanded us to bring out are left in it." Then He will say, 'Go back and bring out whoever you find who has an atom's weight of faith in his heart. They will bring out many people and then say, "Our Lord, we did not leave anyone with any good at all in them."'"

Abu Sa'id al-Khudri ﷺ used to say, "If you do not believe this hadith to be true, recite if you wish: '*Allah does not wrong anyone by so much as the smallest speck. And if there is a good deed, Allah will multiply it and pay an immense reward direct from Him.*' (4:40)" He continued, "Allah Almighty will say, 'The angels have interceded, the Prophets have interceded and the believers have interceded, and there only remains the Most Merciful of the merciful.' He will take a handful from Hell and bring out from it some people who have not done any good at all and have become burnt coals. He will cast them into a river at the mouth of Paradise called the River of Life. They will emerge as a seed emerges in the scum of a flood. Do you not see that what grows against a rock or tree is yellow or green if it faces the sun, while what remains in the shade is white?' They said, 'Yes, Messenger of Allah. It seems as though you must have taken animals to graze in the desert.' He said, 'They will come out of it like pearls with rings on their necks, and the people of

Paradise will recognise them as those who have been set free by Allah, whom Allah will admit to Paradise without their having done any action or sending ahead any good. He will say, 'Enter Paradise. What you see is for you.' They will say, 'Our Lord has given to us something He has not given to any other creature.' He will say, 'You have better than that with Me.' They will ask, 'Our Lord, what could be better than this?' The Almighty will say, 'My good pleasure. After this I will never be angry with You.'" (al-Bukhari and Muslim)

'Adi ibn Hatim ﷺ said, "Once while I was with the Prophet ﷺ a man came to him and complained to him of poverty. Then another came and complained to him that the road was blocked. He said, "Adi, have you seen Hira?' I answered 'No, I have not; but I have been told about it.' He said, 'If you live a long time, you will see a woman in a howdah travel from Hira until she goes around the Ka'ba, with no fear of anyone except Allah.' I said to myself, 'What will happen to the robbers of Tayy who have caused so much trouble in the land?' He continued 'If you live a long time, the treasures of Khusraw [the Persian emperor) will be opened up.' I said, 'Khusraw son of Hurmuz?' He said, 'Khusraw son of Hurmuz. If you live long enough, you will see a man going out with his hand full of gold or silver, seeking someone to accept it from him. Each of you will meet Allah on the day he meets Him with no interpreter to interpret for him between him and Allah. He will say, "Did I not send a Messenger to you?" and he will reply, "Yes." He will say, "Did I not give you wealth and children, and bestow bounty on you?" He will reply, "Yes." Then he will look to his right and see nothing but Hell and then to his left and see nothing but Hell.'" 'Adi ﷺ said, "I heard the Prophet ﷺ say, 'Protect yourselves from the Fire, even if with only half a date or, if one cannot manage even that, then with a good word.'" 'Adi ﷺ also said, "I did see a woman in a howdah travel from Hira until she went around the Ka'ba, fearing no

one except Allah, and I was one of those who opened the treasures of Khusraw ibn Hurmuz. If you live long enough, you will see what the Prophet Abu'l-Qasim ﷺ said about someone going out with his hand full coming true as well." (al-Bukhari)

Abu Bakr as-Siddiq ﷺ said, *"Those shall have the best and more."* Those present asked, "What is meant by "more", caliph of the Messenger of Allah?" He replied, "Looking at the Face of Allah Almighty." 'Ali ibn Abi Talib ﷺ said, "Part of the perfection of the blessing is entering Paradise and looking at the Face of Allah Almighty in Paradise." Hudhayfa ﷺ said, "'More' refers to looking at the Face of Allah Almighty." 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud ﷺ and 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas ﷺ both said, "'More' means looking at the Face of Allah."

Mu'adh ibn Jabal ﷺ said, "People will be gathered on the Day of Resurrection on one plain and a call will go out: 'Where are the godfearing?' They will stand on one side of the All-Merciful, with Allah not veiled or concealed from them." Someone asked, "Who are the godfearing?" He said, "People who avoid idolatry and the worship of idols and are sincere in worshipping Allah will go to Paradise." Abu Hurayra ﷺ said, "You will not see your Lord until you taste death." Abu Musa al-Ash'ari ﷺ said, "He was narrating something to people when they fixed their eyes on something. He asked, 'What has turned your eyes from me?' They replied, 'The crescent moon.' He said, 'How will it be when you see the Face of Allah openly?'"

Malik ibn Anas said, "People will look at their Lord Almighty with their eyes on the Day of Resurrection." 'Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak said, "Allah does not veil anyone from Himself except as a punishment." Then he recited, *"No indeed! Rather that Day they will be veiled from their Lord. Then they will roast in the Blazing Fire! Then it will be said: 'This is what you denied.'"* (83:15-17) He said that what is meant is seeing with the eyes.

When Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal was asked, "Do you say that there will be vision of Allah?" he replied, "Whoever does not believe in that vision is a Jahmite." He also said, "Anyone who says that Allah cannot be seen is an unbeliever." Ibn Khuzayma said, "There is no disagreement among believers that they will see their Creator on the day of the Return. Anyone who denies that is not considered by believers to be a believer. Abu 'Abdullah ibn Batta said, 'I heard Abu 'Umar Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahid, the noted philologist, say that he heard Abu'l-'Abbas Ahmad ibn Yahya ath-Tha'labi say about the words of the Almighty: *"He is Most Merciful to the believers. Their greeting on the Day they meet Him shall be 'Peace!'"* (33:43-44) "Philologists agree that this 'meeting' can only be a matter of seeing and looking with the eyes. Allah Almighty says: *'Those who sell Allah's contract and their own oaths for a paltry price – such people will have no portion in the Next World; and on the Day of Resurrection Allah will not speak to them or look at them or purify them. They will have a painful punishment.'* (3:77)"

The ranks of elevation in Paradise

The believer who desires to please Allah and gain His pleasure should know that Allah "*sees His slaves*" (3:15), meaning that Allah will give to every person according to the measure of his obedience to Allah on the Path to Allah. If someone obeys Allah out of desire for Paradise, that will take him to the Paradise of Allah. If someone obeys Allah seeking His pleasure and simply because He is worthy of obedience, Allah Almighty will give him the pleasure of looking at His Face.

It is related that Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, who was of all women one of the most obedient and devout, said confirming this: "O Allah, if You know that I worship You out of fear of Your Fire, then put me into it. If you know that I worship You out of desire for Your Paradise, then deprive me of it. I worship You because You are worthy of being worshipped and You are My Creator and Lord. I ask for Your love and good pleasure." If someone loves Allah and Allah loves them and is pleased with them, He will naturally give them what they desire and make them dwell in the highest Gardens.

So the meaning of the words of Allah Almighty "*Allah sees His slaves*" is "He will give to every slave according to His actions and intention in action." If someone loves the blessing of Allah, He will receive that blessing and Allah will pour it out on him. As for the one who loves Allah, even if His blessing is removed from him, Allah will give him the greatest gift of all. It is that which Allah boasts about to His angels. One of the strongest proofs of faith and its perfection is preference for the love of Allah and His Messenger over all other things in existence. The Prophet ﷺ said in a hadith: "Anyone who possesses three attributes will experience the sweetness of belief: that he loves Allah and His Messenger more than anything else; that he loves someone for the sake of Allah alone; and that he hates the idea of reverting to disbelief as much as he would hate being thrown into a fire." (al-Bukhari and Muslim)

We cannot see Allah in this world because our sight is not adapted for this task – and in order that we may believe in the unseen. But in the Next World, Allah will alter His creation in whatever way He wishes. Let us illustrate this point using an analogy. In this world, if I become aware of a weakness in my sight, I go to an eye specialist and he prescribes spectacles for me, or recommends me to have an operation. Then I am able to see what I could not see before, because the spectacles or treatment have increased my ability to see. If a creature can do this for another creature – something which raises the capacity of the eye to another degree of vision – what will be the case on the Day of Resurrection when the power of Allah Almighty is involved? Is it not possible that you will see by other rules than the rules of this world?

The mistake that people tend to make is to gauge one dimension of existence by the rules of another. Each dimension has its own laws. We were originally in the pre-time world, which had laws governing it. When we moved into the life of this world, we became subject to other laws. In the life of the *barzakh* or interspace after death, there are further laws. At the Resurrection other laws will apply. And in Paradise or in Hell there is yet another set of laws. We will not die, and we will be in a state of everlasting youth. Indeed, a person who is asleep is governed by different laws from those he is subject to when awake, a fact which the Messenger of Allah ﷺ reminded of us when he said, "By Allah, you will die as you sleep and you will be resurrected as you wake up."

Allah speaking to the People of Paradise

Allah Almighty says: *"Those who sell Allah's contract and their own oaths for a paltry price, such people will have no portion in the Next World and on the Day of Rising Allah will not speak to them or look at them or purify them."* (3:77) And in another *ayat* Allah says about those who conceal the clear proofs and guidance which He has revealed: *"On the Day of Rising Allah will not speak to them."* (2:174) If Allah did not speak to His believing slaves, they and His enemies would be the same in that respect and there would be no point in Him singling out His enemies for His not speaking to them.

The hadith of Abu Hurayra in which the Prophet ﷺ said: "No one will be left in that gathering without Allah calling to him present and saying, 'So-and-so, do you remember a day on which you did such and such?'" has already been mentioned. There is also the hadith of 'Adi ibn Hatim: "There is none of you but that his Lord will speak to Him on the Day of Rising." There is another hadith from Abu Hurayra ﷺ which includes the sentence, "The Almighty Lord will say to His slave, 'Did I not honour you and make you a master?'" Again, there is the hadith of Anas about the Day of Increase, in which Allah addresses the people of Paradise several times.

In general, examination of the hadiths about the vision of Allah will show that most of them also mention His speech. Al-Bukhari has a chapter in his *Sahih* entitled "Chapter on Allah Almighty speaking with the people of Paradise," which contains several *hadiths*. The greatest bliss of the people of Paradise lies in looking at Allah's Face and in His speaking to them. Denying that is tantamount to denying the rest of Paradise. 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud ﷺ narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "I know who will be the last of the people of the Fire to emerge from it and the last of the people of Paradise to enter it. A man will emerge crawling from the Fire and Allah will say, 'Go and enter Paradise.' He will go to it and imagine that it is full, and will return and say, 'Lord, I

found it full.' He will say, 'Go and enter Paradise and you will have the like of this world and ten times more;' or 'you will have ten times the like of this world.' He will say, 'Are you mocking me?' or 'Are you laughing at me, when you are the King?'" He said, "I saw the Messenger of Allah ﷺ laughing until his molars showed. It is said that that will be the person with the lowest degree of the people of Paradise." (al-Bukhari and Muslim)

'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud ﷺ reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "The last person to enter Paradise will be a man who sometimes walks and sometimes crawls and will sometimes be scorched by Hellfire. When he has crossed it, he will look at it and say, 'Blessed is the One who has saved me from it! Allah has given me something which He has not given any of the first or the last.' A tree will appear to him and he will say, 'Lord, bring me near to this tree so that I may seek its shade and drink its water.' Allah Almighty will say, 'Son of Adam, perhaps if I give them to you, you will ask for something else!' He will say, 'No, Lord,' and will pledge that he will not ask Him for anything else. His Lord will excuse him because He sees that he will not be able to endure without it. He will bring him near to it and he will seek its shade and drink its water. Then a tree better than the first will appear to him and he will say, 'O Lord, bring me near to this so that I may drink its water and seek its shade. I will not ask You for anything else.' He will say, 'Son of Adam, did you not pledge to Me that you would not ask Me for anything else? Perhaps if I bring you close to it, you will ask Me for something else as well.' He will pledge to Him that he will not ask Him for anything else, and his Lord will excuse him because He sees that he will not be able to endure without it. So He brings him close to it so that he may seek its shade and drink from its water. Then another tree will appear at the gate of Paradise which is better than the first two. He will say, 'O Lord, bring me near to this one so that I may seek its shade and drink from its water. I will not ask you for anything else.' He will say, 'O son of Adam, did you not pledge to Me that you would not ask Me for anything else?' He will say, 'Yes, Lord, but I will not ask You for anything but this.' His Lord will excuse him because He sees that he will not be able to endure without it.

So He will bring him close to it. When he is close to it, he will hear the voices of the people of Paradise. He will say, 'O Lord, let me enter it!' He will say, 'Son of Adam, what will liberate Me from you? Will it please you that I give you this world and the like of it with it?' He will say, 'Lord, do you mock me when You are the Lord of the Worlds?'" Ibn Mas'ud ﷺ laughed and said, "Shall I tell you why I am laughing?" They asked, "Why are you laughing?" He said, "That is how the Messenger of Allah ﷺ laughed and they asked, 'What are you laughing at, Messenger of Allah?' He answered, 'At the laughter of the Lord of the Worlds. He says, 'Do you mock me when You are the Lord of the Worlds?' He will say, 'I am not mocking you, but I can do anything I wish.'" (Muslim)

The people of Paradise visiting their Lord

Imam ash-Shafi'i tells us that 'Abdullah ibn 'Ubayd ibn 'Umayr reported that he heard Anas ibn Malik ﷺ say, "Jibril came with something like a clear mirror in his hand, in the middle of which was a black dot. He said, 'This is *Jumu'a*, which your Lord presents to you so that it may be a feast day for you and your people after you, and you have good in it. You will be the first, and the Jews and Christians will be after you. There is an hour in it during which no one beseeches his Lord for any blessing which has been allotted to him without being given it, or seeks refuge from evil without something greater than it being averted from him. In the Next World we will call it the Day of Increase.' The Prophet ﷺ said, 'O Jibril, what is Increase?' He said, 'In Paradise your Lord will produce an overflowing river in which are heaps of musk. On Friday, Allah Almighty sends down with the angels whatever He wishes. Around Him are *minbar*s of light on which are the seats of the Prophets. Those *minbar*s are surrounded by *minbar*s of gold inlaid with rubies and emeralds on which sit the martyrs and the highest truthful ones sit. They will sit behind them on those heaps. Allah Almighty will say, 'I am your Lord. You were true to My promise, so ask Me and I will give to you.' They will say, 'Our Lord, we ask You for Your good pleasure.' He will say, 'I am pleased with you, and you will have what you hope for; and there is more in My keeping.'" That is why the Muslims love Friday: because of the good which their Lord gives them on it. It is the day on which the Lord settled on the Throne and on which He created Adam ﷺ and on which the Final Hour will occur.

Those for whom the gates of Paradise will not be opened

The Almighty says: "*As for those who deny Our Signs and are arrogant regarding them, the Gates of Heaven will not be opened to them, and they will not enter Paradise until a camel goes through the eye of a needle. That is how We repay the evildoers.*" (7:40) These words tell us about those for whom the gates of Paradise will not be opened. Allah Almighty has made entering Paradise impossible for them by logic, custom and empirical reality with His words: "*They will not enter Paradise until a camel goes through the eye of a needle.*" (7:40) "The eye of a needle" is the hole in the needle which the thread goes through. The thread can only go through the hole if it is thinner than the width of the hole and is stiff and pointed when it does so; otherwise it will not. If we tell a camel to go through the eye of the needle, it will clearly not be able to do so: it is a physical impossibility.

So we find that Allah Almighty has likened the entry of unbelievers into Paradise to something that is completely impossible. Some people ask what could possibly be the connection between a camel and the eye of a needle. One explanation is that the word for camel can also be applied to a very thick rope made of other ropes plaited together, which of course would never go through the eye of a needle. Another explanation could be that it is a figure of speech like that of a poet who describes his preoccupation with his Beloved and says that his yearning and passion for Him are so all-consuming that he has lost all his weight and become extremely thin. He says that if a camel were possessed of the same passion he feels, it would certainly become lean and thin enough to go through the eye of a needle. Perhaps, then that is what must happen within the heart of an unbeliever to enable him to enter Paradise.

Glossary

Ansar: the "Helpers", the people of Madina who welcomed and aided the Prophet ﷺ.

'Aqaba: lit. "the Pass", a mountain pass to the north of Makka just off the caravan route to Madina, where the Prophet ﷺ met with the first Muslims from Yathrib (Madina) in two successive years. On the first occasion, they pledged to follow the Messenger, and on the second or Great Pledge of 'Aqaba, to defend him and his Companions as they would their own wives and children.

ayat: a verse of the Qur'an.

Badr: a place near the coast, about 95 miles to the south of Madina, where, in 2 AH, in the first battle fought by the newly established Muslim community, three hundred Muslims led by the Messenger of Allah overwhelmingly defeated more than a thousand Makkan idolaters.

dhikr: remembrance of Allah.

Fajr: the Dawn prayer.

hadith: reported speech of the Prophet ﷺ.

Hajj: the annual pilgrimage to Makka, which is one of the five pillars of Islam.

al-Hudaybiya: a well-known place ten miles from Makka on the way to Jedda, where the Homage of ar-Ridwan took place.

ihram: the conditions of clothing and behaviour adopted by someone on *hajj* or *'umra*.

'Isha': the obligatory evening prayer.

Jabariyya: pre-determinist, a name given to those who deny the freedom of the will in a manner which makes no distinction between man and inanimates.

jihad: struggle, particularly fighting for the Cause of Allah to establish or defend Islam.

jinn: inhabitants of the heavens and the earth made of smokeless fire who are usually invisible to mankind.

Jumu'a: the day of Assembly, Friday, and particularly the *Jumu'a* prayer which is performed instead of the *Zuhr* prayer by those who attend it.

Ka'ba: the cube-shaped building at the centre of the Haram in Makka, originally built by the Prophet Ibrahim.

Khakh: a place about three miles from Madina, close to Hamra' al-Asad.

Muhajirun: the Companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ who accepted Islam in Makka and emigrated to Madina. The singular is Muhajir.

Mu'tazilite: someone who adheres to the theological school of the Mu'tazila which is rationalist in its approach to existence. Originally they held that anyone who commits a sin is neither a believer nor an unbeliever. They also held the Qur'an to be created.

Najd: the region around Riyadh in northern Arabia.

Night Journey: the *Isra'* or journey of the Prophet ﷺ to Jerusalem.

Qadariyya: a sect who believed that people have complete power (*qadar*) over their actions and hence free will.

Quraysh: one of the great tribes of Arabia. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ belonged to this tribe, which had great political and financial power both before and after Islam came. Someone from this tribe is called a Qurayshi.

rak'a: unit of the prayer consisting of a series of standing, bowing, prostration and sitting novements.

Ridwan: the Homage of ar-Ridwan, a pledge which the Muslims took with the Prophet ﷺ to avenge 'Uthman when they thought that Quraysh had murdered him at al-Hudaybiya in 6/628.

shahada: bearing witness, particularly testifying that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. It is one of the pillars of Islam.

Shari'a: the legal system of a people, based on the Revelation given to or followed by their Prophet. The final *Shari'a* is that of Islam.

shaytan: a devil, particularly Iblis.

shirk: the unforgiveable wrong action of worshipping something or someone other than Allah, or associating something or someone as a partner with Him.

Sunna: the customary practice of a person or group of people. It has come to refer almost exclusively to the practice of the Messenger of Allah.

sura: a chapter of the Qur'an.

Tabi'un: the second generation of the early Muslims, who did not meet the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, but learned the *deen* of Islam from his Companions.

tafsir: Qur'anic commentary.

taqwa: awe or fear of Allah, which inspires a person to be on guard against wrong action and eager for actions which please Him.

Uhud: a mountain just outside Madina where, five years after the Hijra, the Muslims lost a battle against the Makkan idolaters. Many leading Companions, and in particular Hamza, the uncle of the Prophet ﷺ, were killed in this battle.

wilaya: friendship with Allah.

wudu': ritual washing to be pure for the prayer.

zakat: a wealth tax, one of the five pillars of Islam.

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TRUE PROMISE *of* PARADISE

Sheikh Muhammad Mitwalli ash-Sharawi

ALLAH MOST HIGH SAYS: "But you prefer the life of this lower world, even though the Hereafter is better and more lasting". Indeed, most people – even the devout – spend far more time thinking of all the details of their day-to-day dealings with the *dunya*.

But if we understood properly how matters truly stand for every human being, we would give far more thought to that which awaits us in our graves and when we arise from them to take our places, for good or ill, in the *Akhira*, the Hereafter. Whatever we find there, be it unimaginable bliss or unspeakable torment, will be with us forever.

In this important book the erudite and much-loved Egyptian scholar, author and broadcaster Shaykh Muhammad Mitwalli al-Sha'rawi, Allah's mercy be upon him, offers a vivid and authoritative description, based on the Qur'an and other classic sources, of the conditions we shall meet with in the Next World, the eternal abode.

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